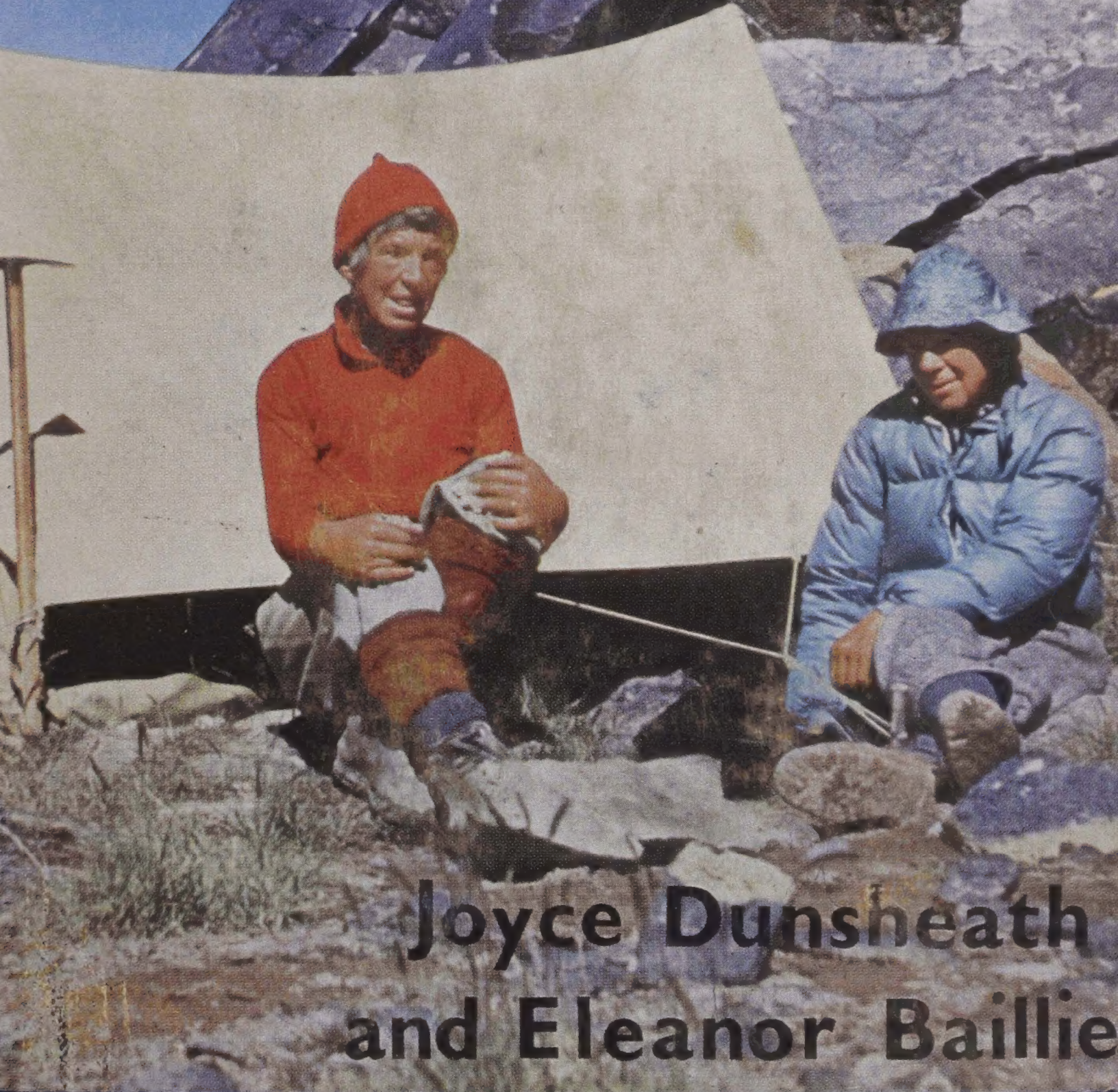


# AFGHAN QUEST



Joyce Dunsheath  
and Eleanor Baillie



# Afghan Quest

The Story of their

ABINGER AFGHANISTAN EXPEDITION 1960

by JOYCE DUNSHEATH,  
ELEANOR BAILLIE

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*The chapters of this book were written  
alternately by Joyce Dunsheath and  
Eleanor Baillie.*





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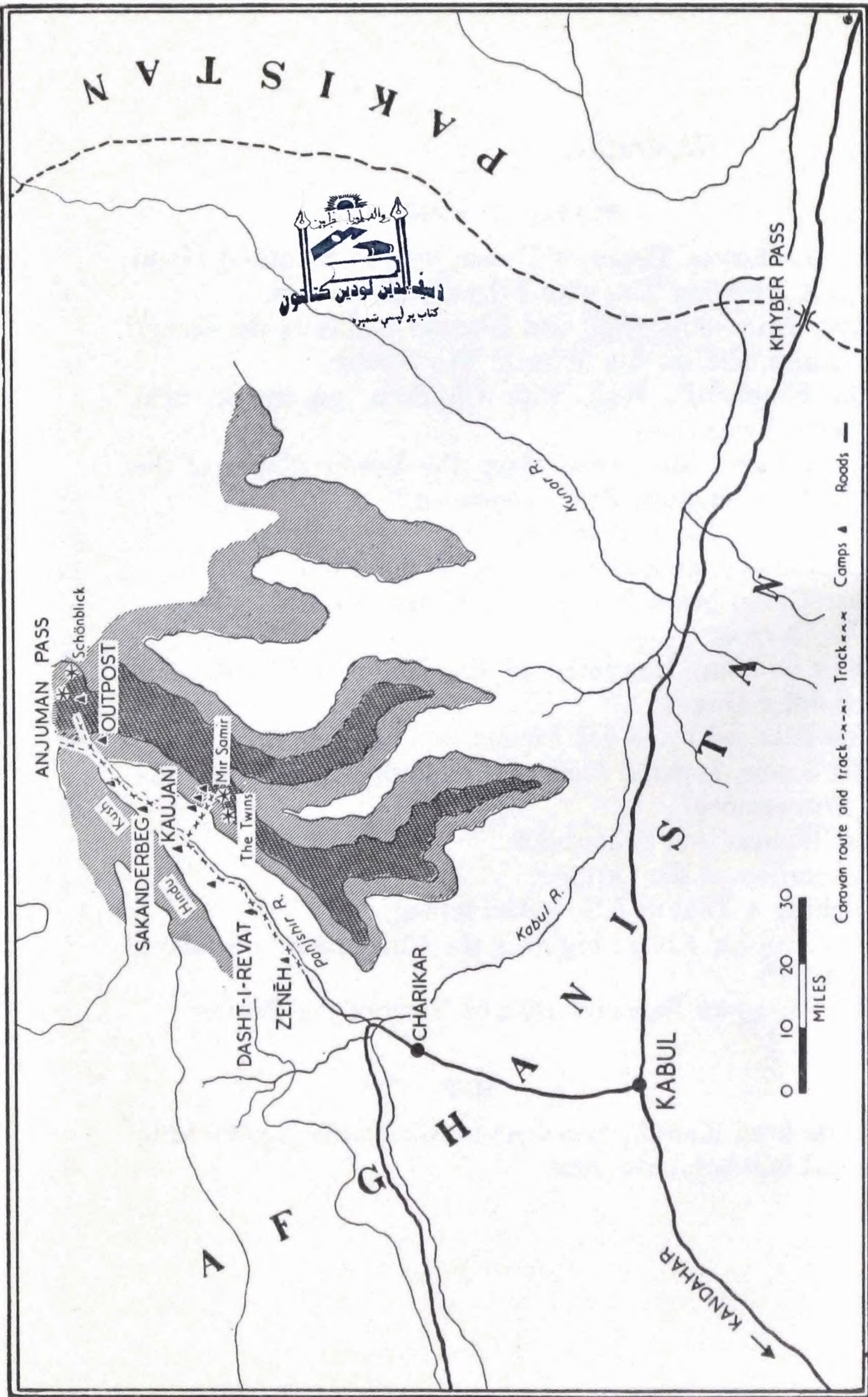
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Route from Kabul (6900 feet) to Mir Samir (19,882 feet) and the Anjuman Pass.



# 1

## *The Curtain Rises*

WELL, let's go anyway, even if we are only two," said Eleanor. We had reached a point when everything seemed to be against us—the hair-raising picture presented to us of the dangers awaiting two women in remote valleys in Afghanistan was gloomy enough to deter the most stout-hearted; in addition, all our efforts to obtain financial assistance had failed, and as a result our promising young climbing companions had had to withdraw. The situation was summed up thus in a Surrey paper: "Slow financial sponsoring and other reasons have reduced the team to herself and Eleanor Baillie, the pianist."

The idea of a women's expedition to Afghanistan had been simmering in my mind for twelve months, and Eleanor's remark set the seal to the final form it should take. Ever since I had climbed in the Caucasus in 1957<sup>1</sup> I had had an urge to climb in the Pamirs, that tight knot of peaks entangling the remote corners of Russia, Sinkiang, and Afghanistan, and I had asked to be included in any Russian party climbing there. By the summer of 1958, however, in spite of my importunity, I had been forced to accept the fact that permission to do this from the Russian side would not be forthcoming. I therefore looked again at the map of Central Asia and saw that the southern slopes of the Pamirs came down into Wakhan, that curious spit of land left with Afghanistan in the treaties of 1893–95 as a buffer between Russia and the North-west Frontier of India.

Afghanistan had a pleasant sound in my ears: I recalled my visit to the Afghan Embassy in 1956, when I was seeking a visa for travel through Afghanistan by car *en route* for the Himalayas.<sup>2</sup> The Embassy was then a war-damaged London house in a very bad state of repair, and, in the temporary absence of a

<sup>1</sup> *Guest of the Soviets*, by Joyce Dunsheath (Constable, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> *Mountains and Memsahibs*, by Joyce Dunsheath *et al.* (Constable, 1957).



staircase, my only contact with the Consul had been by telephone from the entrance hall to his room overhead. Nevertheless the cordiality of his voice had been obvious when, in reply to my question as to the cost of a visa, he said, "No charge. We are friends of the British." Yes, Afghanistan was the answer.

A further visit to the Afghan Embassy confirmed my original impression of cordiality, but permission to visit the country for any length of time lay apparently, not with officials in London, but with the Government in Kabul, so I followed up the advice given me, to write direct to Mr Abdullah Tarzi, brother-in-law of the late ex-King Amanullah. I soon received an encouraging reply, and although it was not quite all I wanted, it set my feet itching to be on the way. I learnt that the Russo-Afghan frontier was forbidden territory, and so was Wakhan, and close contact with the Pamirs, on which I had set my heart, was taboo. But Mr Tarzi in his reply said that the Government would be very pleased to extend our tourist visas in Kabul for a period of two months so that we could climb the mountains of the Hindu Kush and visit Nuristan. Good enough!

Friends with whom I talked, who had never been out of Europe, were horrified that I should be planning to go up into the mountains of such a wild country where women were kept swathed in chaudris behind purdah walls. They were quite convinced of the horrors that would result from the fanaticism of the mullahs and lawlessness of the inhabitants. Having failed to shake my resolve, however, they implored me to take firearms as a protection. "You will assuredly be robbed, raped, and have your throats cut from ear to ear unless you shoot first," they said. I have always found mountain-dwellers friendly, curious certainly at the peculiarities of foreign women, but never hostile, so remained unconvinced of any real danger. Moreover, I had no experience in the use of firearms, though Eleanor, during the War, had received instruction in revolver shooting from a brother in the Navy. It seemed to us that the carrying of weapons would only provoke attack, and in the final resort an ice-axe would be a very effective weapon!

Having decided in my own mind, during the summer of 1959, on the broad outlines of what I wanted to do, I set out to find

kindred spirits, good climbers, agreeable companions, lovers of adventure. Many were immediately attracted to the idea and said yes in the first breath, but the cold facts of finance and home commitments, together with the pressure from timid friends and relations, caused them one after the other to withdraw. Of those who really gave serious consideration to the idea, one developed a strained back, one could not escape from home ties, and one, having reviewed her resources, did not feel free to risk them all on one hazardous adventure. By January 1960, however, we were a fairly firm party of four, and I made an application to the Mount Everest Foundation for a grant of £610, based on carefully worked-out estimates. If the grant were obtained each member would still have to pay her own fare (about £300) and contribute £100 towards the general expenses. This, based on the narrowest of margins, would cover the total cost. From previous experience I felt I could count on the generosity of industrial firms for gifts of food and equipment, and we were encouraged to go ahead.<sup>1</sup>

Two of this preliminary party were young climbers eminently suitable for such an adventure. One of them, a recently qualified doctor, grasped at the opportunity; the other, a young mathematics teacher, looked on this as the golden opportunity of her life. "My feet have been walking on air ever since I had your invitation to join this wonderful expedition," she said. A third, a dentist, was ready to throw in her lot as a reserve. Four has always seemed to me to be the optimum number for a small climbing expedition, and so we closed the list. Then the blow fell. On April 13 a brief letter informed us that our application had been considered by the Committee of the Mount Everest Foundation and had been turned down. I was particularly disappointed, as in 1956 the Abinger Himalayan Expedition of four women had obtained a grant of £500, and this new expedition seemed to us an equally worth-while and altogether more original project. We immediately tried other trusts, but committees take their appointed time and it was too late. All three of the young aspirants had to withdraw for lack of funds, and only Eleanor and I remained. After a full discussion during a week-end at my home in Abinger our resolve steadily hardened,

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.



and we decided that, come what might, we two alone were for the mountains of Afghanistan!

Eleanor Baillie later proved to be a most agreeable companion, of the stuff explorers are made of. She had previously wandered in remote parts of the world and had developed an invaluable philosophic outlook. Never once did an unexpected situation take her by surprise, and this, combined with an innate courage and determination in the face of difficulties, had bestowed those essential personal characteristics so necessary for happy travel. The fact that we were quite different in temperament made us approach things from different angles, but the decisions reached were always a happy compromise. I am hasty and careless by nature, doing one thing while thinking of the next, and Eleanor's slower reactions were a good antidote. My steady nerves, on the other hand, with resulting failure to get excited, evened out her nervous reaction to petty, irritating things. After four months together we parted excellent friends, which says a lot for mutual tolerance.

From now on I paid frequent visits to the Royal Geographical Society's Library and browsed among the shelves labelled "S.E. Asia," building up an idea of this country which we now had reasonable hopes of visiting. Few descriptions of Afghanistan have been published during the present century, for so few people have visited the country—or, at any rate, been farther than the confines of Kabul or Kandahar. The bulk of the descriptive literature was written in the nineteenth century during the British occupation, mainly by Army officers or Government officials who recorded events and facts rather than places and people. The distant mountains of the Hindu Kush did not interest such writers except as a barrier against warlike tribes and northern peoples. Maps were compiled for the Army, but stopped short at the high mountains, these being merely indicated by wavy lines in inaccurate, if artistic, contours.

All the books I read, however, lacked the flame of vitality, but this was fanned to life for me by a meeting with Wilfred Thesiger who had travelled, accompanied by only local porters, in the Panjshir Valley and Nuristan in 1955. I had the good fortune to be able to discuss my plans with this intrepid travel-

ler, and in a fascinating conversation he sketched for me his Afghan journey, telling of the beauty of the Panjshir river rushing madly through deep, rocky gorges or spreading itself over wide stretches of flat valley. He also described the sturdy Tajiks who acted as porters for him, and their primitive life in stone 'ailoqs' clustered into villages on the banks of the river. I should have liked to hear more, but he was off to Ethiopia the next day, and I was lucky to have caught him if only for a few hours. All too soon he bade me farewell, and vanished for months into the unknown desert which he loved so much. Looked back upon to-day, this brief encounter seems a dream in which an ephemeral figure stepped into the picture I was building up in my mind, and as quickly and quietly vanished again.

The area of interest now narrowed, and as I extended my reading one particular peak began to stand out: it had a name and a known height—Mir Samir, 19,882 feet. This mountain had been attempted by Eric Newby and Hugh Carless in 1956, and was successfully climbed for the first time by a German party in July 1959. After seeing a brief note of this achievement in the *Afghan News*, which I was now receiving regularly from the Afghan Embassy, I got in touch with the leader, Harald Biller, through friends in Germany. He kindly sent over a description of the climb which he had written for publication. He and his wife with two other climbers had had a most interesting journey out by car, and after a few days in Kabul getting permits had set off up the Panjshir Valley. After one or two practice climbs the party tackled their main objective, Mir Samir, and set up a base camp at 4100 metres. From a bivouac just below the summit they were successful, but complained bitterly of the treacherous, brittle nature of the rock. He further said that this climb proved more difficult than anything he had done in the Himalayas, not excepting Annapurna IV.

After carefully considering all this information Eleanor and I decided that two women unsupported by other climbers had less chance of reaching the summit, but we decided to get as far as we could. If the summit proved impracticable there were doubtless other virgin and less formidable peaks near by or



higher up the valley. It was interesting in any event to find out how different was the situation from what I had imagined. Mir Samir towers in isolation on a southern spur of the Hindu Kush, and it is a full four days' journey north to anything else of even comparable height.

Having gone thus far with our plans, we made an application to the Royal Geographical Society for approval of our expedition. In granting this the Committee agreed to lend us surveying instruments. I was very pleased, as, ever since my attempt at mapping in the Himalayas, I had longed for another opportunity to improve my skill and knowledge. I did not know then the difficulties that I should encounter—the isolation of Mir Samir and the refusal of Afghan porters to carry heavy loads to great heights.

Although neither of us is a botanist, we are both interested in flowers, and when we found that the Herbarium at Kew had had no specimens from the Hindu Kush since 1860 we readily agreed to collect what we could. We went, therefore, armed with folders for drying and pressing flowers and envelopes for collecting seeds.

We also agreed to include among our projects the testing of sweat glands at high altitude and the keeping of records of the common cold. The apparatus for the first was simple—a notebook and black liquid and "Sellotape"—and for the latter even simpler—a bundle of printed cards on which to record observations. I assured the investigator that I had never had a cold while climbing and living an entirely open-air life, but he assured me that a scientific record of that very fact would be of interest.

A manufacturer of scientific instruments, the Cambridge Instrument Company, also asked us to take a pH meter and to carry out tests of various kinds so as to test the instrument under such exceptional conditions as we should no doubt meet.

Over and above all these specific projects we were vitally interested in getting to know the Afghan people, in sharing if possible in their way of life and in making friends with them. Only by travelling in a simple way apart from the tourist track can one get a true picture of a country and appreciate the problems of a people and its Government. Cold statements of fact

read in a newspaper or journal, on one's return become real human documents.

I am an enthusiastic photographer, and even Eleanor, who usually has no interest in the art, decided to take a camera and a supply of colour film. We hoped to bring back a live record not only of our own adventures but of the life and habits of the people among whom we should travel.

Eleanor agreed to accept responsibility for food-supplies, and, on the basis of the all-women Abinger Himalayan Expedition of 1956, worked out what we hoped would prove an adequate diet for strenuous conditions. I undertook the duty of collecting the Expedition equipment—tents, cooking apparatus, spare climbing gear (ice-axe, crampons, pitons, and ropes), first-aid and medical supplies—which would be in addition to our personal things. We put into the stores extra tea, sugar, and sweets to give as presents *en route* and a supply of aspirin, coloured vitamin pills, and antiseptics to use for simple people who had no possibility of medical treatment.

We gave much thought to the journey out. There were various possibilities: one could fly direct to Kabul, or go by sea to Karachi, then north by train and bus, or go overland all the way from London. I decided against taking a car this time as there are no roads suitable for wheeled traffic in the Hindu Kush, and, moreover, I was the only driver.

Transportation of our baggage was a problem to be faced, for we did not want to take it with us, and there are always risks in sending it in advance where it has to cross frontiers. Fortunately, a British firm, Glaxo, with regular business with Central Asia agreed to send it by sea and rail with its own consignments, thus leaving us free to travel as we pleased. We felt it was a pity to fly at high speed over so many interesting countries, and a sea voyage, while offering a welcome three weeks' relaxation, did not give opportunities of seeing landscape or people. On the other hand, a journey by land all the way would be very time-consuming, and not really a good training for a climbing expedition. However, we finally concluded that the opportunity to see the world outweighed the other considerations, and decided on a compromise.

We worked out the following itinerary. We would go on one

of the new Russian Baltic Line ships taking five days from Tilbury to Leningrad, at the amazingly cheap price of £20, spend one night there, and probably three in Moscow, so that I could renew acquaintance with climbing friends of 1957. We would continue south by train, travelling 'hard class' through the U.S.S.R., and break the journey at Tbilisi (Tiflis), where I had an introduction to the Georgian Alpine Club. We found that no one was allowed to cross from Russia direct into Afghanistan, so we planned to continue south to Teheran, hoping that the Russian-Iranian border would not present too many difficulties. It might not prove easy, but from all we could learn there did not seem to be any serious political problems.

Eleanor had set her heart on climbing Demavend (18,600 feet), the highest mountain in Iran, and by the time we left England she had roused the same enthusiasm in me, so we decided to spend three days in Teheran on the way, to carry out this project. As it turned out, this was to prove the most frightening of all my climbing experiences, but we did get to the summit, and after some consequent delays were able to proceed on to our main objective.

Information on travel beyond Teheran was vague—there was a railway line, but trains were uncertain; there were buses but no timetable, and beyond the Iranian frontier only erratic local buses, one every few days. Working out a schedule in which we took reasonable account of all these hazards, we concluded that we might reasonably hope to reach Kabul during the first week of August.

Through mutual friends we had an introduction to Mr and Mrs Downing, of the British Embassy in Kabul, resulting in an invitation to stay with them as long as we were in the capital of Afghanistan. We felt that it would be a great boon on arrival in the city to be taken into their home in the Embassy grounds, a green oasis in an inhospitable desert.

We decided on July 10 as the date of departure, and this necessitated the dispatch of the half-ton of baggage not later than mid-June. The early part of the month was therefore given up to completion of the lists and assembly of goods. Many firms had promised us gifts of food, but it was a little





*On the Lower Slopes of Demavend: A Smashed Hand and Reviving Tea  
with Friendly Herdsmen*  
See page 63.

*Joyce Dunsheath (left) and Eleanor Baillie at the Second Camp Site on the  
Way to Mir Samir*  
See page 147.







*The Shepherd's Wife, with Children, on the Descent from Demavend*

*See page 69.*

*The Elburtz Mountains, from the Lower Slopes of the Isolated Highest Peak, Demavend*

*See page 62.*



difficult to ensure a definite date at rather short notice, although fortunately they reacted quickly to our appeal. Each day brought packages by post or delivered by van, till Eleanor's London flat began to look like a warehouse, and a shed in my country home overflowed. On D-day itself I met a train at Paddington bearing the medical supplies kindly collected for us by the young doctor who had had to withdraw from the party. By a miracle the bulk of the stores and equipment were at the Glaxo warehouse by the appointed time. The remaining sixty pounds of food and equipment that could not be collected in time had to go with us, so our dreams of travelling light, with rucksack on back, vanished. Moreover, to climb Demavend *en route*, we had to have with us heavy boots, trousers, climbing rope, and ice-axes. We limited ourselves to three packages each—rucksack, kitbag, and grip—so that if necessary we could carry these ourselves from ship to train and from train to bus.

A few months before our departure the Rector of Kabul University paid a visit to London, and at an interesting luncheon party described the plans for a new University campus and the rapidly changing conditions in Kabul. He said that nurses trained under him had gone into the hospitals without chaudris (a circular veil completely covering the body from crown of head to tip of toe), with the result that within a week other women were following suit, breaking thus with a centuries-old custom. My husband, as Chairman of Convocation of the University of London, was able, in return, to give the Rector information which he was seeking about the organization and administration of a modern British university. This contact was followed by a dinner-party at the Afghan Embassy on the invitation of the Ambassador, from whom we learnt more of his native country, so backward by our standards and yet so anxious for progress. Mme Ludin, wife of the Ambassador, told us of the beauty of Kandahar, and served a most wonderful rice dish for dinner, prepared in Afghan fashion, giving us a foretaste of delights to come.

Time rushed along, and July 10 was upon us, all too soon for the multiple personal arrangements that had to be made before departure. I resigned my post as Commissioner of Girl Guides



in Streatham, handed over my duties as Treasurer of the Surrey Amenity Council to a deputy, and notified all other societies with which I am connected of my impending five months' absence. Domestic arrangements required attention: house-cleaning was entrusted to faithful Nancy, outdoor work to Brian, the gardener. My husband's many duties would keep him as usual in London for most of the week, while relatives and friends would cater for week-end entertainment. He and I made a rendezvous for Srinagar for October 19, and I left a suitcase of dresses needed for subsequent hotel life in Delhi to be brought out by him, although I was later horrified to find that this cost him £24 for excess air luggage! Taking a last look at my bank balance and my will, I was ready.

Eleanor and I left London on a chilly English summer's day, but the driving rain could not dampen the fire in our hearts, kindled by the excitement of setting out and the anticipation of sunny, adventurous days ahead. We did not then appreciate that later, when the sun shone down pitilessly upon our heads and we had an ever-consuming thirst, we should long for the rain and coolness of England!

## 2

### *Preamble and Baltic Approach*

WHEN Mrs Joyce Dunsheath first mentioned to me at a gathering of the Ladies' Alpine Club, held at the English-Speaking Union in September 1959, that she was thinking of an expedition to Afghanistan—was I interested?—I of course said it sounded most exciting—and left it at that. It was unlikely that I could take the time or find the money to go so far. I never gave it another thought.

Towards the end of the year, through the death of a much-loved aunt-by-marriage, I received a legacy. I shared out a part of it, and decided that the balance would take me to visit cousins in America; it would probably not now be sufficient to fulfil my great dream of the Himalayas, but I certainly meant to use the money for *travel*, whatever happened. This, too, would have appealed to the dear one who left me the means to journey to some (to me) new land. She had become quite blind, and loved to hear of the adventures that always have come my way. "Tell me *more*," she used to say, after my annual wanderings to some of the more unusual spots that mountaineers with a love of exploration—unlike some climbers who love just a difficult rock-face—may find. I heard the late Geoffrey Winthrop Young, that distinguished mountaineer and writer, make this great distinction between the 'rock-gymnast' and the true explorer of mountains.

I have perhaps been fortunate in getting to places before they have become 'popular,' and consequently exploited. During schooldays Geography, as a subject of the curriculum, was one of my weaker ones, but that did not mean that a burning desire to travel was not in my very blood. Adventure—of almost any sort—has always called me. Taking an atlas and looking for the 'darkest spots' in a physical map, and finding *some* means, financial and otherwise, of getting there, has been a frequent method of achieving an exciting holiday. I do not necessarily mean the well-known 'darkest spots'—such as, in

Europe, obviously the Mont Blanc massif—though those, of course, are wonderful, but expensive. No—I thrilled to the more ‘unknown quantities’ of the ‘shadings,’ say, in Corsica, Sardinia, Iceland, the Lofoten Islands, Turkey, Morocco, and Crete (which to so many people just means ‘Knossos’). These, and others, with careful planning and everlasting saving up could be just within my means—those of the not always fortunate professional musician, who is rather apt to be in the category of ‘casual labour.’

I have reason to be grateful for good health, though I seem to be rather ‘accident-prone.’ I am very tough, as Scots often are, and I have never minded how uncomfortably I have to travel, if I *arrive* (ultimately!). Living rough and eating strange food have never worried me. The unknown, geographically speaking, has no terrors for me. I ‘travel hopefully.’

I cannot take the slightest credit—even if I wanted to do so—for going, usually alone, to places some people call dangerous, adding that they admire my courage. That, to me, does not mean courage, for the simple reason that *I want to go*. It would be courage if *they* went, with all their fears! It takes real courage to deal with people in everyday life—the awkward and the dishonest, often those one is seeing all the time, who have little to commend them. It is in face of these that one’s spirit quails; it is all so hopeless, so un-worth-while. Time is used to no purpose. Yet people who cope so much more successfully seem not to realize how great a part courage plays in the most ordinary situations, when the sensitive nearly collapse under the strain.

There must be a good deal in heredity. On both sides I have had many relations and ancestors who ‘ventured.’

To bring it down to less than a hundred years ago, for example, my mother’s father in 1862 went to Greenland as a surgeon on a small whaler—sail, of course—and the privations were terrible. In Greenland he lived largely on blubber (even this, which I also have eaten, has been, in these days, made quite palatable). Recent expeditions to Greenland mean planes, mechanized transport, comforts in sleeping and eating. There is, of course, nothing against this, but the pioneering and so-called romance have largely departed for ever. In 1863 my



grandfather took over six months to sail to China, where as a medical missionary he built his own hospital, the first in Swatow. His future wife, beautiful and twenty years old, had the courage to follow in a sailing cargo-vessel, 'in the Captain's charge,' taking seven months, in bad weather, to arrive for her marriage. She did not call that courage; she quoted quite simply from the Bible: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Almost all her ten children, including my mother, were born in this part of China. Pioneering, you see, is in my blood. For, on my father's side, there were those who went to the 'ends of the earth,' as Scots are prone to do, and, still earlier, those who had the courage to die as patriots for Scotland—against England. I am glad that is no longer necessary!

Perhaps that is why I have so little fear of death itself. I have already had a number of strange 'brushes' with it, in many guises. But "Man is immortal till his work is done"; I have a great deal of faith; and, as Shakespeare tells us, "cowards die many times." Whenever, wherever, and however I die, I have *lived*. I can say truly and truthfully with Walter Savage Landor:

Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art;  
I warmed both hands before the fire of life;  
It sinks, and I am ready to depart

All this preamble is to explain the better *why* the idea of Afghanistan, when I came to consider it seriously, had such a tremendous appeal. It is one of the few countries where there is *still* an element of mystery, even of terror to some people. The mountains of the Hindu Kush are less known than the Himalayas now are. Less is generally known about the races of people, vaguely called Afghans, who inhabit the country.

So when Joyce Dunsheath, whom I scarcely knew, wrote to me after Christmas 1959, giving more detailed plans and probable cost, and definitely asked me if I would consider joining the expedition to Afghanistan (to be called Abinger Afghanistan Expedition 1960), I decided in less than a second that I would go, whatever befell, and even if I had to live on next to nothing for the rest of my life! America could wait—if necessary, for

ever. I might, however, be able to get enough to go there some day, but my legacy was now earmarked for Afghanistan.

It was interesting to recall that the very name of the country had fascinated me since the age of nine. I was a great reader as a child. We were never allowed to buy or read so-called 'comics' (which, incidentally, were not of the horrific and sadistic type then; they were merely stupid, and thought to spoil our taste for good literature), and we never seemed to want them. So I read fairly advanced things for my years, of all types. Conan Doyle I simply loved—not only for Sherlock Holmes, but in general. A mention of Afghanistan in connexion with Dr Watson set me wondering. I had never heard of it, and I asked about it; and I still remember being shown it on a map, and told that really very little was known about it and that the people were supposed to be rather wild and savage. Then, at a later date, I was interested in newspaper reports on King Amanullah and his Queen who dispensed with the veil and appeared in Paris fashions—little thinking that I should one day be meeting connexions of the ill-starred pair.

From the New Year of 1960 until early July I was in frequent touch with Joyce—for, with the many vicissitudes of the team, I remained constant! Many people, though not surprised at anything I did, in the way of going to rather unusual spots, expressed surprise that I should go off on a rather wild enterprise with some one who was virtually unknown to me as a companion and climber. I believe we had exchanged remarks on exactly two occasions before she mentioned Afghanistan! The fact was, I am told, that when she was considering members of a team the Honorary Treasurer of the Ladies' Alpine Club happened to say, "Why not ask Eleanor Baillie—she likes going to odd places!" For my part, I felt that as Joyce was proposing to travel through Russia to reach Afghanistan eventually—by going across Iran—it would be a good idea to journey there with some one who had previously been in Russia, knew something of the language, and had a few personal contacts there. Obviously, too, she must have had some experience as an organizer, with her Abinger Himalayan Expedition of 1956. I was quite prepared to follow her leading. I realized that



temperamentally we were very different—but, after all, we wanted to *do* the same thing.

I was appointed food officer, which meant much thought and writing. My knowledge of calories had not been very extensive. It simplified matters a good deal to know amounts taken and used in the Himalayas. But we realized we should have to endure greater heat as a general thing; therefore some items should be added and others omitted. I found that firms<sup>1</sup> were responsive and most generous in answer to my requests. But, of course, when it came to the point almost of departure some products went a-missing temporarily, or did not turn up in time to be carted away in Joyce's car. One can hardly expect everything to go 'according to plan' even in Great Britain, but it was good practice for the fairly numerous *contretemps* we should meet in the ensuing months.

To get into a plane, to travel from one place to another in the shortest possible time, in comparative luxury, may suit some 'travellers,' or may be a necessity—but to me it is the dullest method of transport on earth—or, more accurately perhaps, in its own element! (Learning to *fly* a plane I had once found most enjoyable—a very different thing.) Provided one has the time—I will not add, the money, for it often costs little more, no more, or indeed less—it is many times more interesting to halt here and there, or to work out some roundabout route, perhaps using different methods of transport for the different stages.

This was an excellent starting-point of agreement between Joyce and myself. There were raised eyebrows when I talked of visiting Copenhagen, *en route* for Afghanistan from London! It was not, however, so strange as it sounded, for there was this comparatively new and cheap trip by the (U.S.S.R.) Baltic State Steamship Line from Tilbury to Leningrad, calling at three other ports, with slight variations in these from time to time. In a so-called classless society it is strange, not to say amusing, to find four or five classes on their ships. But we felt that this 'baby cruise'—on the *Estonia* for our date—of five days in the bottom-grade class would be interesting (*luxe*, I, II, and III were the gradings), and not too long, even at the worst. It turned out, once on the ship, that we all had the same food and

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix.

public rooms; the difference was in the luxury or otherwise of the cabins. We thought ours, for five people, really very good indeed. Our three companions were lady members of a mixed party of about twenty-seven British librarians going to visit some Soviet libraries.

This was only the second trip of the very comfortable and quite beautifully appointed *Estonia*—German-built, strange to say, of 8496 tons, and capable of taking 420 passengers. There were pleasant touches like racks of fine gloxinias. The food proved to be excellent, as also did the service—neither subservient nor haughty, but courteous and friendly. The stewardesses and waitresses were young, and suggested the student type, the former in neat grey suits, the latter in white blouses and peacock-blue skirts. All the officers were helpful. Good English was fairly general. Joyce had been a little concerned about twenty pounds' worth of extra films that had had to be sent direct to the boat. An officer, questioned casually in a corridor, at once knew about them—and us. Yes, they were already in cabin 314 (so they were). This 'pinpointing' of information happened to be useful in this case. In Russia itself it gave one an unpleasant feeling that *nothing* about the visitor is not known; nothing, indeed, is left to chance; everything is organized to the last degree. However, apart from this one incident, there was no hint that we were not in the friendliest possible community, with our comfort the chief consideration.

Food, which, one must admit, plays a big part by its variety and interest, in any ship, was of excellent quality and ample. On the first day, and subsequently, there appeared on the menu things which may be more commonplace to the 'better-class' Russian but which are in the nature of luxuries to the average Briton, such as salmon and caviare. We certainly did justice to every meal, and found pleasant companionship. Perhaps it was hardly strange that by far the greater number of passengers were British and French; it is not yet, of course, particularly common for Russians to be able to travel to Great Britain or France, much as they might enjoy doing so (the ship had sailed from Le Havre). The interesting party of librarians, travelling in particular to study the libraries of Moscow, were rather typical of the sort of passenger.

The only most extraordinarily poor equipment in the entire ship was—the deck-chairs! These were old and in a positively dangerous state of repair; they collapsed at the slightest provocation, or, indeed, with no provocation at all. As there were no *serious* accidents resulting, one can say that they caused much amusement, and were a source of introduction between passengers! I hardly think they were put there deliberately for us to break our spines, though that could have happened! The first one Joyce occupied landed her flat on her back. I fear I laughed unrestrainedly before helping her out, seeing she was obviously not damaged. I was not so caught, and thereafter occupied a basket-chair, no longer new but more or less intact. If one had not *sat* on deck comfortably, one could *sleep* in more luxury in one's bunk. I was not a little impressed with the excellence of the blankets (in a fourth-class cabin!). They were of the 'doeskin' variety, of fawn-coloured wool, and as we had left Tilbury in cold, drizzling rain, they were another point to appreciate; and sleep came easily in this stable ship.

I began my trip, true to type, by a series of slight accidents! I had crashed my shin on a very low bench in the Customs Hall at Tilbury. I had hardly been on the *Estonia* an hour, when I fell over a projecting iron step and drew more blood from the same leg. My first full day at sea began with the collapse of my basket-chair! I was helped from the wreckage by a pleasant fellow-passenger; he had the decency, or self-control, not to laugh at the picture *I* now presented, instead of Joyce; I sustained bruises!

We had several films during the trip; they were all of travel or occupations, or artistic performances in the U.S.S.R. They were quite good as documentaries, but the commentaries were rather apt to suggest that everything was just that much better in their country than elsewhere—probably true, of course, of certain things (timbers and fruits, for example), but hardly of everything! One cannot escape from propaganda. This was particularly true of the magazine type of literature in the pleasant reading-room, with its quite reasonably varied selection of books in various languages (there were classics particularly of both England and the old Russia, as well as modern works, light and serious). Periodicals published in Moscow, but



in French and English as well as Russian, ranged from the woman's magazine with idiotically naïve romances, in which every one was working for the good of the State, to the definitely political where, as well as reading the significant letterpress, one had the pleasure (or otherwise), for example, of seeing large named portraits of the people, white and black, representing Communism in every single African country—not very cheering.

On Tuesday, July 12, we landed at Copenhagen for over four hours. There is something homely and friendly in the atmosphere of Denmark's capital. In pleasant sunlight the buildings, not *too* grandiose, suggest neither great wealth nor yet the poverty which in many Continental cities does not allow for their adequate repair. Nor do the back-streets give any impression whatever of the squalor all too prevalent even in Europe. Determined to do as much as possible in the time at our disposal and to stretch our legs to their utmost capacity, we wandered far and wide, eventually landing back in quite the wrong part of the docks. In vain we looked for the gleaming white ship, or a red flag with the hammer and sickle; we were lost.

Here, however, the friendly help of various Danes, mostly seamen or dock labourers, was indeed welcome; we were led here and there, and eventually phone calls were made, gratis, on our behalf to find out exactly where the ship had berthed. Gratefully we were at last on the right road, and back in time to our temporary home.

The next day Polish authorities came on board, and we were finally allowed to land, for less than two hours, at Gdynia. It proved to be of interest chiefly as a comparison with the pleasant impression of Copenhagen. We were able to make a complete round; and barbed wire, armed guards, and forbidding-looking factories for one knew not what, seemed the things to strike one most forcibly. It was warm, and in the shopping centre, if so it can be designated, the many women and girls looked reasonably gay in cotton frocks; but the poverty and paucity of goods displayed was almost unbelievable—rather like a very poor village of one street in Great Britain. It is true there seemed to be a great deal of building activity on large blocks of flats, with some bright colours in their make-up. But

somehow the whole place, even with its "Hall of Culture," left a feeling of complete depression not easy to explain; we had disembarked full of anticipation, but we were glad to return to the ship.

The flats are certainly necessary, for we saw many shanty homes, with harassed-looking women carrying water from outside sources; and hordes of children were playing among these slum dwellings. There were a few civic attempts at public flower-beds; and it was refreshing on the outskirts of the city to see campanulas, bugloss, and evening primroses growing wild more prolifically. German was the language most generally understood when we asked directions.

Stockholm, a day later, seemed a welcome contrast, so full of wellbeing does this city appear to even the casual visitor. Old and new architecturally blend successfully; and the great Town Hall of which the Swedish are justly proud, with its interesting clock and bells, is indeed different from some of the fine old churches, in style and conception. We used the three hours at our disposal to good advantage, studying the city.

The date being *le quatorze juillet*, that day was well and truly celebrated by the fairly numerous French passengers on the *Estonia*, and we Britons and those of any other nationality had the opportunity of joining in the fun, for in the evening a really very enjoyable fancy-dress dance was arranged. It is always a little disappointing that many ship's passengers 'cannot be bothered' to think of some simple costume to add to the general festivity. I feel it almost behoves one to try to join in; it seems a matter of public spirit. So I chose the slightly risky proceeding of guying (not too fiercely, for our own safety!) at least one aspect of Communism—that comrades sometimes fall out—and I suggested to Joyce that we should team up as a couple of the world's workers, by no means acting at times in too comradely a manner towards each other!

With our shabby trousers, shirts, heavy boots, handkerchiefs knotted about our necks and at the four corners on our heads, and ice-axes inverted for digging purposes, we looked as good a pair of navvies as you could wish to find. We printed in capitals, and pinned on each other's backs, these large notices—mine in blue letters in English, Joyce's in Russian characters in

red—"Workers of the World—Unite." When we 'processed' into the lounge at the parade we paused, faced each other, dug assiduously for a few moments, and then endeavoured to strike each other furiously on the head with our lethal weapons! It won great applause, though not a prize; and previously, in the Captain's private sitting-room, which had a lovely little piano, and quite charming, if so-called Victorian, flower paintings, the officers seemed much to enjoy the joke, and we were photographed several times, with no adverse effects when we landed on Russian soil!

Actually three prizes were to be given, but an extra prize was awarded—for "Peace"! Whether the wearer of this garb (she seemed to be French) also had her tongue in her cheek, or just thought it would go down well, we shall never know. Perhaps the ship organized it all to impress the tourists! It seemed to be a white bed-sheet, worn Grecian style, with the sash across one shoulder bearing the word PEACE. A version of Picasso's Dove appeared on the front! Sad that Peace cannot usually be achieved so simply. After all the merriment the ship's crew gave an entertainment, which had some good turns by dancers, piano-accordionists, and singers, and there was a pleasant, carefree attitude in the very simplicity of some of the performers, from stoker to stewardess, as we found out. This was followed by games and dancing for everybody. There certainly seemed to be good-fellowship all round.

The day following, to be our last on the *Estonia*, was full of interest, for there was much to be seen from the decks: an island here and there, glimpses of the Finnish coast to the north, of Russia to the south. In the afternoon, after officials from a pilot boat had come aboard, we passed very close to Kronstadt; it looked rather forbidding, and was ringed with innumerable ships of all types, but chiefly impressive-looking naval vessels.

We were getting nearer to Leningrad by now, and there were sundry forms to be filled in, chiefly to do with currency; but there were also rather naïve questions regarding dangerous drugs, firearms, and explosives. The young official dealing with our cabin was a very pleasant person, and stamped our forms, with no trouble to us and with a pleased interest.

We were next treated to some quite informative talks over the



loudspeakers—a history of Leningrad, propaganda about its “production” figures, the story of the *Estonia*.

The sea approach to Leningrad is curious and prolonged. Green banks with much willow-herb stretch far out like breakwaters. When we finally reached the quay we were greeted with much youth-song on radio; people rushed about, presenting bouquets and posies to male and female alike. It took some time for our particular pieces of baggage to be unloaded, and we watched with interest tough and hefty-looking *women* doing most of the loading on to the mechanical trolleys. The Intourist agent who had been presiding in the lounge of the *Estonia* guided us through a waiting-room to the new woman guide who awaited us beside an elegant sapphire-blue limousine, to whirl us away across the city to our hotel.

We had one companion in the car for a time, an elderly Russian widow lady, able to visit her daughter for the first time in twenty-two years. At a city gateway, much guarded, many people were waiting on the far side to greet friends as they passed through the arch. At least six ecstatically excited people leaned into our halted taxi to embrace our fellow-traveller. Tears flowed, and there was much laughter and joy.

Our hotel, with one side on to the famous Nevsky Prospect, was of another age, the age of Chekhov or Turgenev, at least in style, built and furnished in the grand manner. Our huge bedroom, a kind of salon, high in the roof, had velvet couches and finely carved heavy cabinets and tables; there were bronzes and oil paintings, good of their kind; the anteroom and bathroom attached were more modern. There was plenty of hot water, but it was full of rust. The restaurant, also in the roof, mirrored walls and fine chandeliers, seemed to drift one to Versailles, not so much as a matter of place as of time, suggesting a dream-world fast vanishing, mistakenly populated with solid-looking, comfortably dressed peasant types for the most part, with a very few foreigners, judged by dress and language. There was a different menu for the Russian with his thirteen roubles to our twenty-eight. Intourist furnished us with the usual book of coupons for meals. We had not realized that those for dinner and supper (not the bourgeois ‘lunch and dinner’!) could be used indiscriminately, if one exceeded the set amount by

choosing rather more expensive things. We enjoyed our 'big sturgeon' but exceeded our bill by *one* rouble; consternation—we had not yet any currency. Then, like a godsend, I remembered a solitary one-rouble note given me in England for luck by a Scotswoman who had been an important visitor to the U.S.S.R. Arguments ceased and gave place to smiles—an omen that most difficulties might be smoothed away.

We had originally intended to fly straight on to Moscow on landing at Leningrad, but we had, after all, too much luggage to make the journey economic; and I personally was very glad, as I had always felt more attracted to Leningrad than to Moscow. Again, probably, early life was still playing its part, for an aunt of mine in the late eighteen-hundreds had lived in the St Petersburg of that day, at the British Embassy; and she would regale a fascinated little niece with stories of the gaiety and beauty, winter and summer, of the wonderful capital of all the Russias, one of the loveliest cities in the world. Alexandre Dumas *père* said it had no equal. Something of these 'wraiths' I could still see: perhaps much was just in the eyes of the beholder—anyhow, later, Moscow exercised no 'charm' whatsoever by comparison.

We made the most of the complete day at our disposal, wandering unattended, by the canal and the lovely churches onion-domed and spired; by the Neva with a hint of its four hundred bridges. The shops alone seemed unimpressive, ill-filled, and worse dressed. We spent a few hours where one could spend a lifetime—studying some of the two million of the most beautiful art treasures in the world, in the Hermitage (Winter Palace). There had been a good and informative film on the ship, displaying and describing some of the masterpieces, and showing the grand staircase which had 'run blood' in a last stand during the Revolution. Now the show pieces could be seen by the many instead of the few, and we had to join a long queue of the population—but one wondered if they were made much *happier* by the privilege. The accent is always on Culture, not Happiness, and the latter is not acquired by money, and not necessarily by culture. There are still plenty of glimpses of slums that the party of tourists would be unlikely to see, as does the individual, deliberately walking aimlessly, in a

sense, to get the feel of a city, rather than to see its sights. (One assumes that slums will all be eliminated in time.) The Union Jack was flying alongside the Hammer and Sickle over the Hermitage, for a fine collection of British pictures was on loan.

In the evening a pale-green limousine bore us off for the 10.35 P.M. train to Moscow—not before I had stupidly enough laid down on the reception counter a precious, leather-cased travelling alarm-clock, needed for the mountains later. I never saw it again, in spite of many inquiries; when I thought of their shops, and ours, I was neither surprised nor censorious.

We had decided to travel 'hard class' on the train, and we had pictured something like wooden benches, though we had been informed that the train was an 'all-sleeper.' Four to a compartment, the convertible bunks proved to be most comfortable, with clean linen. Joyce slept soundly, but I deliberately kept awake, and watched the panorama of flat country in soft moonlight from my top bunk, half lying, first one way, then another. In a sense it was monotonous, sparsely wooded, with huts and shacks near the isolated 'Christmas-trees,' and then somehow one thought of old Russian legends, to be brought to the twentieth century by the sudden blinding glare of a factory, apparently in the midst of nowhere, working fiercely, with a sense of urgency, it seemed, on some plan one could not fathom.

It had been pretty obvious that we were the only two foreigners on the train, and when we arrived in Moscow, punctually at 9 A.M. next day, there was a pleasant woman Intourist guide waiting for us—outside the right compartment of the right carriage; this exactitude is quite breathtaking and almost frightening, or could be so in less propitious circumstances. We were immediately presented with large bouquets of mixed country flowers—phlox, gladioli, dahlias, coreopsis smilax, and asparagus fern—and there was a military brass band playing martial music—that not especially for us, we assumed! The habitual limousine, a navy-blue one this time, bore us on a very long journey, it seemed, to the very outskirts of the city. Here, the comparatively new, vast 'luxury' hotel, the Ukraine (we had no choice!), soars upward thirty storeys,



looking very like the huge Moscow University at first sight. We were in room 965, on the ninth floor, which had a reasonably priced buffet if one did not wish to descend to the restaurant or dining-room. (It was only later we learned from a Russian friend that there were no fire-escapes in the hotel!) Our chambermaid was almost too attentive; at times it was irksome, or embarrassing!

We renewed our wanderings somewhat casually, going the opposite way to the one we intended to go, but there was always something of interest, including vast building schemes of flats, offices, and so on, and not forgetting the kindly people who gave us directions about buses and suchlike. Moscow, with now over eight million inhabitants we were told, is certainly seething with life, in a solid kind of way. Some small incidents seemed to be a little out of the picture one is intended to see, at least in the main part of the city: a woman and child *begging*, and three very drunk men shouting in one of the Metro trains—in the afternoon! A much more charming scene, but not one the authorities would advertise, will stay very pleasantly in the memory. We did not return by the normal route to the hotel—through archways under vast blocks of flats—but by what could almost be described as ‘country’ roads, fringed by little wooden houses with lovely carving on beams and eaves. The remaining ones were still inhabited, and there were many pet cats and dogs about, too; but it was obvious that a number of the houses had already practically vanished. One was back, certainly, in the long-dead days before the Revolution. A comely mother was giving a laughing child a bath under an old-world street pump! The picture of nineteenth-century peasant life was really individual and heart-warming. The whole scene was so unlike that presented by the level, dull appearance of the general mass of the city’s workers, who seem to have almost one face. There is little variety in the women’s dress—tidy, but uninteresting.

A game one could play, if so minded, was to look for the face of a real aristocrat. We saw two such faces: there was a little old lady sitting under her parasol in addition to the shade of a few trees—it could have been a corner of “The Cherry Orchard”—and an old man passed us, with the bearing of a



*An Afghan Bus at Kandahar*

*See page 88.*

*Kaufan—Home and Happiness to our Men*

*See page 129 and passim.*







*Base Camp below Samir—our Horsemen*

*See page 160.*

*The Outpost*

*See Chapters 12 and 14.*





soldier, and *eyes* that had seen *many* things, some perhaps best forgotten, but they were still mirrored there.

Two things in which the Muscovite seems to indulge are endless soft drinks from self-service machines or stalls, and lotteries, which surprised us. There is little litter about, for it is meticulously put into tall, aluminium-coloured metal 'vases' about two feet high. It did not say much for the quality of the women's shoes (stockings were not worn) that when it rained many of them removed their shoes and *carried* them, walking barefoot through puddles and running gutters!

We had the pleasure of meeting Eugene Gippenreiter, of the Mountaineering Association of the U.S.S.R., who had recently returned from Great Britain, where he had made news, by an accident, climbing on Snowdon with Sir John Hunt; he still had the scar on his forehead, reminding him of his sojourn in Bangor Hospital! In 1957 he had organized Joyce's climbing in the Caucasus. He was a charming companion, and spoke good English; his face was not typically of any one country.

'Delaying tactics' are a commonplace in Moscow, and are the greatest irritation, even when a Summit Conference is not the issue. One's travel tickets are arranged and paid for in one's own country, yet they are held up till the last moment, and one is told to come back at such and such an hour, three or four times. It is made apparent that one is 'on the end of a string.' It was vital that we left as pre-arranged for Tbilisi, yet no tickets . . . In London I had met socially a Moscow official who said he would gladly offer any help when we came to Moscow—if he were still in the same position. I decided to go and call in his aid. He was no longer there, and a telephone directory does not exist for private persons, but his successor kindly wrote a note for us and said he would also telephone the bureau in question. Our tickets were produced immediately on our return. . . .

Similarly, in shops, and even post-offices, assistants never have change. Here again I decided that as a Briton I would not be trodden on, and would fight this annoyance. In a post-office I was assured they had no change; I said I would wait there until they got it. A crowd of sympathizing American fellow-sufferers collected round me. I stood my ground; eventually,

after much further argument, the assistant produced it—from her handbag.

After three full days in the capital, in which we did *not* do 'all the usual things' but certainly saw a number of equally or more instructive ones, we had to go southward. Yet another (jade-green) limousine whirled us off to a different, far-away Moscow station, and here Joyce and I lost each other in the vast, milling crowds—and *she* had the tickets—a truly alarming situation for me, with barely enough Russian to read the destination boards, let alone to speak the language. I could not even be sure that I should be allowed through, with no ticket, even if I ever did find the right platform. I kept calling out madly, "Tbilisi," and that I was English! At last, with only a very few minutes left before the time of departure, a kindly man addressed me in German. Thankfully I explained as best I could the situation. He got me to the right barrier (through a long passage) and past the ticket-collector, with some excuse or other. *There* was a piece of my luggage just vanishing on to the train! And *there* stood Eugene, who had come to see us off. Joyce had rushed back to where she first got separated from me, outside the station, but returned just as the train was about to move off at 8.20 P.M. All was well; but not quite all!

*Georgia, an Ancient Kingdom*

As the train drew out of the Ukraine Station I leaned out of the window and waved my white handkerchief till the figure of Eugene Gippenreiter was lost to sight. Then Eleanor and I sat down and looked around to see in what sort of carriage our 'hard-class' tickets had landed us. The seat was quite comfortably upholstered, so we wiped out one interpretation of 'hard.' A berth above our heads and one in a similar position on the other side indicated that only four people would sleep in the compartment, so that a cheap ticket did not mean overcrowding. Moreover, there was more width than is usual in European trains; our knees would not knock those of the travellers opposite. We next turned our attention to the occupants and found them to be a buxom married woman of about forty and a young man in his early twenties. Encouraged by their smiles, I greeted them in Russian, and learnt that they had been visiting relations in Moscow and were now returning to their home in Georgia. I, for my part, told them of our travels and of the pleasant time we had had in Moscow helped by the young man who had seen us off at the station.

At this point the guard came round and demanded tickets. To my horror, they were not in my handbag nor in my pocket! Of course, I remembered, Eugene had taken charge of them to locate the seats when I had rushed off to find Eleanor, and he had obviously not given them back to me. I did my best to explain to the guard; and the woman opposite, sensing our apprehension, came to the rescue and said she had seen the tickets in the breast pocket of the young man on the platform as the train left. The guard went away, and, on his return a few minutes later with the inspector, the story had to be retold, the young man adding his corroboration of his aunt's story. This did not impress the inspector much, but when we said that we had got the tickets through Intourist at the Ukraine Hotel in Moscow he became all smiles and said that it would be quite



all right: he had merely to telephone from Tbilisi. We were much relieved, as travelling without a ticket might have had serious consequences in the U.S.S.R., and imprisonment was the last thing we wanted at this stage of our enterprise!

It was now getting late, so we prepared for bed. The washing accommodation provided at the end of the corridor was in a filthy condition, so we made the sketchiest of ablutions and turned in. We had been given a mattress, a cotton cover, two sheets, and a pillow with which to make up our beds one above the other. Eleanor took the top berth and opened the window as it was very hot, but so many smuts flew in on her that she had to close it all but an inch and then sleep with a towel over her head. I was luckier down below and slept well till 6 A.M., when I got up quietly and went along to the toilet. Finding that it had been cleaned overnight, I seized the opportunity of a good wash and then went back to bed for a little while without waking the other occupants of the carriage. About eight o'clock tea was brought round in glass mugs by a restaurant attendant, and our Russian companion insisted on paying for everybody. The train now became alive, and there was much passage to and fro along the corridor.

We were travelling through the flat, pleasant country of the Ukraine. Small detached houses dotted the countryside, each surrounded by fields of Indian corn ripening in the hot sun of southern Russia. The wheat had already evidently been harvested, for the straw stood in house-high stacks round the edge of the fields. No hedges blotted out our view or separated one holding from another, and the fields, by British standards, were large. Now and again we passed by the more pretentious buildings of collective farms, but there was little machinery. Acre after acre of sunflowers turned up their heads to the sun in a blaze of gold.

About ten o'clock our attention was distracted from the view by the appearance of a blue-shirted attendant, who, after plugging in to a power point in the corridor, brought the long lead of his vacuum cleaner into the compartment. We all lifted our feet as he searched the recesses under the seats and picked up the pieces on the strip between them. It was then that I noticed that the Russian lady was crying, and when I expressed

sympathy she told me that she had been visiting her son in Moscow who was mentally ill through overwork and nervous strain. She soon, however, became more cheerful under the stimulus of conversation, in which she had to use all her ingenuity to make herself understood, and produced from her voluminous bag some illustrated children's books she was taking home with her for her little nieces, and with them helped me to improve my knowledge of her language.

The countryside, though still mainly green and agricultural, was now interspersed with industrial areas. We had been through Kharkov during the night, and now, at Rostov-on-Don, factory chimneys belched their smoke into the air and gaunt mine-shafts rose out of the earth, around which sordid little blackened houses stood, packed closely together along the cobbled streets. At a smaller town, Slavyansk, our travelling companions alighted, and their places were taken by a man with a close-shaven head and an enormous woman in voluminous black skirts who sat like a shapeless jelly-bag on the mattress, overflowing it in all directions. They were stolid Slavs and settled down to endure the journey, which was obviously taken as a means of getting somewhere and not for enjoyment: we had little conversation with them.

We went along to the restaurant car later in the day and had the good fortune to be served by a German-speaking waiter. We were pleased to find that we could use our coupons, left over from the Moscow hotel, and enjoyed a good meal. We sat on for some time, for the wide windows of the dining-car afforded us good views of the country through which we were passing. Many were the curious glances cast at us, for we were the only non-Russians on the train. European tourists normally fly rather than face two days and two nights on a Russian train, but we enjoyed the experience and felt we were really getting to know the U.S.S.R. and its people. *Tout savoir, c'est tout pardonner!*

During the second night we were kept awake by rumbling noises as the train passed through numerous tunnels, for we were crossing the mountains of the Caucasus, and by early morning were on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. All day long we ran close in by the sea, and the coast showed itself as one long

pleasure beach; at times the holidaymakers were concentrated on the shore at such popular places as Sochi, Adler, and Gagra, and at other times were strung out along the rocky shores. I hung out of the window eagerly as we passed through Sukhumi, recognizing the Sanatorium, the Abkhasia Hotel, and the beach where, tanned to a chocolate-brown, I had spent many happy hours in October 1957. I could distinguish men and women lying on slatted boards to keep themselves above the burning sand, wearing only the briefest of bikinis and incongruous wide straw hats. All along the promenades were tables protected by gay sunshades, and out at sea little sailing-boats tacked their way in and out among mahogany-coloured bathers.

Whenever the train stopped passengers got out to buy cold drinks, wonderful 'maroghine' (ice-cream) and fruit of all description; gherkins too were a favourite thirst-quencher. Sometimes we got tantalizing glimpses of the mountains of the Caucasus, and I recalled the high valley of Svanetia, wondering if the simple country folk I had met there still remembered me. When the train turned inland at Ochamchiri I could have believed I was travelling through the Canadian Rockies on the Canadian Pacific Railways, so similar was the route.

As we sat drinking tea in the restaurant car, whose wide windows now let in the cool air of the evening, we passed through Gori, where Stalin was born. Music was played on the loudspeakers in the train as we passed through. When it grew dark we returned to our compartment and got ready for our arrival in Tbilisi: the train was only one hour late on a journey of forty-eight hours.

As the train drew into the station the mob of porters lining the platform rushed forward, and even before we came to a halt were invading the carriages, pulling down luggage from the racks and rushing out with it before returning for more. We descended on to a platform filled with passengers and friends meeting them, and there we stood, our six pieces around us, wondering what would be our next move. Then we heard a voice shouting, "Dunsheat! Dunsheat!" and a man waving aloft a piece of paper approached us. We responded to the name, and a young girl with wavy auburn hair, following closely behind a young man in sports jacket and grey flannel



trousers, came forward with outstretched hands and bade us welcome to Tbilisi. We explained about the lost tickets, and although they dismissed this as of little importance, the sleeping-car attendant overtook us before we were clear of the platform and demanded 20 roubles (about 13s.) for bed-linen. In spite of our protestations that this was included in the ticket, he got quite angry and barred our way out. The young man, however, treating him with scant ceremony, pushed him out of the way and conducted us through the barrier to a waiting taxi. Obviously our every movement was known to Intourist, and we were parcels that had to be delivered safely to their destination, ticket or no ticket!

The lighting of the streets through which we passed was too dim to show much of the buildings, but we soon came to a wide thoroughfare festooned with coloured lights where trolley-buses rattled up and down, weaving their way among cars and taxis and the strolling crowds. We pulled up at a stone building labelled "Hotel Tbilisi," and entered with our escorts through the stone portals to an entrance hall similar to the usual Intourist hotels of Moscow, pompous and impersonal. We were obviously expected, and were at once taken to the third floor, where we were shown into a suite of spacious rooms—entrance hall, bed-sitting-room, and bathroom. A maid pulled the heavy red plush curtains together and indicated the service telephone on the bedside table.

After a quick wash we went down to the ground-floor restaurant. As most of the tables were full of noisy people, we sat down timidly at the first empty chairs we saw and produced the meal coupons that had been handed to us on arrival. A horrified waiter immediately rushed up to us and waved us into an adjoining room, obviously closed for the night, for there were neither waiters nor guests. A disgruntled man was brought on duty again and presented us with a menu. We pointed to various items, but each time he shook his head and said, "Ne, Ne," after the manner of Mr Khrushchev. Eventually the restaurant manager came in and gave instructions that we were to be given cabbage soup, chicken 'Tulaka,' compote, and coffee. We were only too pleased to eat this (and, indeed, it proved quite palatable) and to retire immediately to our

rooms to relive in pleasant dreams the events of the past forty-eight hours.

The singing of birds outside our window woke us the next morning, and as my eyes fell on the heavy furniture and dark wallpaper I remembered that we were still in the U.S.S.R. Tbilisi is the capital of an ancient land whose recorded history goes back to the third century B.C., and whose racial characteristics have remained true through frequent invasions by Romans, Byzantines, Persians, Arabians, Moguls, and Turks. We could not help wondering how far we should find their character moulded to the Russian pattern since the entry of Georgia into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1936.

As we wanted to make the most of our three days in the capital, we were up in good time, washed under a running tap (for, as usual in the U.S.S.R., there was no plug though plenty of hot water), and prepared to go down to breakfast. I opened the door and started back in horror, for I was confronted with a ten-foot white figure leering at me from the dark corner opposite. It was only Stalin commemorated in plaster, dead these seven years! We walked along a wide corridor hung with pictures of Georgian landscape, in massive gilt frames, to the head of a magnificent marble staircase lit with imposing chandeliers. We left the key of the room with the woman sitting at a table (for all service is by floors in Russian hotels) and went down to breakfast. There was no difficulty with service this time, and we were not the only diners.

On our way up to our room again we stopped at the Intourist office to inquire how best to see the sights in a limited time. We learnt that a tour of the city by car with guide would cost fifty roubles, so we said we would walk but would like a guide. This could be provided free of charge from among the University students who in giving this service also improved their English. We were told to come back at 11 A.M., so we returned to our room and wrote letters. It always had to be letters, for post-cards are so difficult to obtain outside Europe. Later we found a poor selection at the General Post Office, obviously put out for propaganda, and ran a few to earth in a street kiosk, but everybody was surprised that we should want such things. I suppose a card is an expensive form of correspondence.

An hour later the telephone in our room rang and we were informed that our guide was ready. We found a charming student awaiting us; she had an air of aristocracy and elegance, a feature we noted among Georgian women wherever we went. She carried her head proudly, displaying to full advantage her glorious long auburn hair, and her young slim figure was shown to advantage in a simple cool green summer frock. She accompanied us in our wanderings throughout our stay and was always well mannered, friendly, and charming.

By the girl's side stood a squarely built man of about fifty dressed in a businessman's dark-grey suit. His face was wreathed in smiles as Marina introduced him as Mr Ivan Alexis Ivanishvili, President of the Georgian Alpine Club. Bowing over our outstretched hands, he said how pleased he was to see us in his country. He had heard of our impending visit from his compatriots Joseph Kahiana and Mischa Khergiani, with whom I had climbed in the Caucasus in 1957 and in whose Svanetian village I had stayed. He excused himself from accompanying us on a tour of the city that morning, as he had business to attend to, but invited us to visit the Georgian Alpine Club premises that evening. With courtly grace he bade us farewell and withdrew.

Marina proposed a visit to the old parts of the city that morning, and we readily agreed. As we passed through the swing doors of the hotel we came out into pleasant sunshine, and, keeping in the shade of the tree-lined pavements, we were able to go on foot without getting unduly hot. We first visited the old Zion Church, built in the sixth century and restored in the eighteenth. Following the pattern of most Georgian churches I have seen, it consisted of one large hall unencumbered with pillars, at the end of which stood the massive altar. On it stood a gilded cross said to be that of Nina, who first introduced Christianity into Georgia. The walls were painted with figures of saints, and the rood-screen, elaborately carved and inset with gold leaf, was mellowed by the light filtering through the stained-glass windows. Women, with scarves over their heads, were sweeping the wide expanse of the floor with long brooms, unimpeded by chairs, for the congregation stands during the services. I asked Marina if the church was still used



as a place of worship, and she said, "Why, of course," in surprised tones. All pure Georgians are Christians, although there is a Muslim element brought in by the twelfth-century invaders, and they appear to practise their religion without interference.

We passed through the central square of the city, where our eyes were drawn to the stone figure of Lenin, standing, arm outstretched in characteristic attitude, fingers pointing upward at some invisible goal. The name of Stalin has been commemorated in a new bridge and quay extending a mile or so outside the town, a favourite promenade for young people after the day's work is done. From a near-by street we ascended a steep hill to the old palace, dating from the eleventh century, and from this height looked across to another hill, where we could see the ruins of an old fort, a derelict mosque, and the glint of the blue enamel of the Roman baths. On the same hill was an enormous figure of a matron, symbolic of Mother Georgia, erected by order of the Central Government in 1958.

Marina told us an interesting legend of the founding of Tbilisi, which became the capital in the sixth century, replacing Mtskheta, six miles away. The king of Georgia, while out hunting in the neighbourhood, shot at a deer, and, wounding it, pursued it over hills and through woods. It stopped for a few moments beside a spring of crystal-clear water to bathe its wound, which at once healed, and it was able to escape the pursuing hunter. The king had a city built on this spot, and gave it the name of Tbilisi ("Warm Springs"). A less beautiful but more realistic story says that when the king was out hunting he saw a pigeon fall into a spring, and, coming up to take the bird, found that, having fallen into hot water, it was boiled and ready to eat!

The morning's visits concluded with a tour of the Botanical Gardens. Here we found a series of hills planted with every conceivable tree—in fact, the claim is made that it contains a specimen of every variety of tree in the world. We saw only one formal garden. The remaining ground was rough grass slopes of varying gradients which we crossed and recrossed at different levels. At the highest point we stood on a little bridge over a chasm and looked down on miniature waterfalls and grassy terraces.

We left the Gardens by a tunnel cut out of the rock on to the level of the fortress entrance, presumably once constructed for military convenience. We were amazed to find that thousands of books were being brought down here to be torn up and destroyed, but no one could, or would, tell us why. The coolness of the tunnel made us forget the heat of the day, but we found on return to the Hotel Tbilisi that the outside temperature was over 80 degrees. This was, however, the highest reached during our stay.

That evening we were called for by Marina and "Mr Alexei," as we came to know him, and taken in a car to the headquarters of the Georgian Alpine Club, situated in an attractively laid-out public garden. As we walked towards the blue wooden building a white-haired lady stepped out on to the veranda, and was introduced to us as Mme Alexandria Djapharidze, one of the founders of the Club, and one of a distinguished family of mountaineers. Behind her came four other members of the Club, two men and two women, all well-known Georgian climbers. We were shown into a room hung with pictures, photographs, and descriptions of climbs in the Pamirs, and through this to another room given over to climbs in the Caucasus. Here were letters from Douglas Freshfield, one of the earliest British climbers to make ascents in this area, and the visiting-card of Una Cameron (Past President of the Ladies' Alpine Club), which, they said, had been brought down after eighteen years from the summit of Kasbek. Here too were displayed in a glass case the camera, crampons, and notebook of a brother of Mme Djapharidze who was killed in 1948 while climbing Ushba, that pinnacle of rock in the Central Caucasus which so resembles the Matterhorn. His sister had been out every year in an attempt to find some trace of him, or some reason for his complete disappearance, and after twelve years she had found his body completely preserved in the ice. It was brought down and buried with honours in the park, and a statue is to be erected over the spot.

In the third room, used for administrative purposes, refreshments were laid out on the polished mahogany table, and we drank to the health of the Club in Georgian champagne, the Club members responding with a toast to the Alpine Club and

the Ladies' Alpine Club of Great Britain. We were told that the Club was founded in 1936, and numbered 500 members, living in all parts of Georgia. We were generously presented with books of Georgian poetry in English.

Not content with providing this hospitality, our hosts then took us up in the cable-car to the top of Mount Mtatsminda, where we had a wonderful view of the city stretching along both banks of the river Kura. Myriads of lights sparkled from the huddle of little houses along the banks of the river, from the Government buildings and hotels of the main street, which cut its way through a maze of lanes and alleys, and from the scattered farms on the hillsides around. It was too dark to see far, but we could imagine the giants all around stretching up to Kasbek and Elbrus in the north, and nearly to Ararat beyond the frontier in the south.

As we walked to the funicular which was to take us down again we passed through well-laid-out gardens with beds arranged in formal floral designs. A huge stone globe representing a map of the world contained recesses planted with flowers, so that each country had its own colour. Out of the colourful mass emerged—a sputnik! As we waited for the funicular to start a shriek from behind made us turn hastily, to see an old man rolling down the steep stone incline bordering the track. He was brought up sharply by a cement wall, and lay huddled there, with every one shouting—till some one picked him up and bundled him into the train. Nobody seemed to care; nobody examined his injuries, and one could only hope that at the end of the ride he would be able to walk and reach his home.

Our hosts bade us farewell at the hotel door, asking us to be ready early the next morning for an excursion along the Georgian Highway. This magnificent route through the Central Caucasus has been known since the first centuries of the Christian era, and brought travellers and traders from Europe into Asia and the Middle East. It became important as a military highway in the eighteenth century, when Russia turned envious eyes on the land beyond her southern boundary, and was widened and paved by her, so that now vehicles of all sorts can travel on a good road through Georgia. It flanks the



foot of Kasbek (16,546 feet), the mountain where Prometheus is said to have been chained in eternal torment for having brought down fire from heaven to men on earth.

It was midday before Mr Alexei and Marina arrived in a Volga car, so that we did not get far enough to get a glimpse of the famous mountain, but we passed many interesting historic places and monuments *en route*. At Mtskheta, the old capital six miles along the road, we went into the eleventh-century church known as Speti-Tshovema ("Living Pillar"), the largest in all Georgia, and I was interested to see, a few miles farther on, a tiny church perched high on a hill, just like the church at Ipari in Svanetia. At Ananuri, forty miles from Tbilisi, we alighted to visit the old fifteenth-century fortress of a Georgian prince, which contains two churches within its walls. Sightseeing is thirsty work, and we were glad to pause in the garden restaurant of Ananuri and eat caviare and 'shashlik' (kebab), washed down by Georgian wine, followed by ripe melon from the garden. We went only a little farther up the pass before we had to turn back, so as to be in Tbilisi before darkness closed in on us.

On the way back we made only one stop, and that to visit the garden of a man who had started a new fashion in gardening and who had been responsible for much of the characteristic lay-out of the public gardens of Tbilisi. Now, a little old man of eighty, he hobbles round on two sticks, his back nearly bent double as he proudly shows his curiosities. He took us into his greenhouse in which he reared his prize specimens and showed us the tubs and boxes in which they were to be planted. In the lay-out he worked out intricate patterns of colour, using not only unusual flowers and leaves but the strangest materials—bits of pottery, broken glass, scrap iron, and coloured stones, producing a most remarkable effect. All round the garden were receptacles of every description—tables made of logs, woven baskets, hollowed rocks, coloured shells—to hold these massed colours. Inside his house we saw another aspect of his handiwork—flowers pressed between papers or patterned on to silk, and many paintings which he had made of his beloved flowers.

Back in Tbilisi in time for a late supper we were surprised to

meet in the restaurant a man and woman from England. She was a Georgian by birth, and this was her first visit to her native country for twenty-seven years. She had come to see her brother, but was not allowed to stay with him in his home. She could only visit him by day and had to return to the hotel to sleep.

We spent the last morning of our stay examining the shops. There were no multiple stores, and the little shops had only a poor display of goods in the windows. We could, however, enter freely, and noted the high price and very poor quality of clothing. How far away seemed Regent Street, with its huge stores and expertly dressed windows displaying goods from all over the world!

The last afternoon we spent in the Fine Arts Museum, a wonderful repository of the nation's wealth. Here were assembled paintings, ikons, metalwork, and jewellery from the sixth century onward, in amazing profusion, all Georgian handiwork. Finally, through the good offices of Mr Alexei, we were taken into a basement gallery where the most precious possessions of the museum were kept under lock and key. Here were treasures from the churches—ikons, goblets, vestments of the priests, gold and silver ornamented books and jewellery, crosses, enamel-work, bas-relief in silver and gold—the fabulous wealth of past ages.

The afternoon was rounded off with a visit to a café which offered genuine Tbilisi mineral waters, seen spurting up in a variety of colours from a central fountain sending the water through coloured elongated vases. In an adjacent room we ate hachipuri, made, not as I had seen it in Svanetia, like a hot cheese sandwich, but as a pastry framework containing a mixture like Welsh rarebit surmounted by a poached egg—an excellent dish! The service was not all it might have been, and we were secretly amused when a Georgian at our table said, "Bad service can be found in a Capitalist country, but something could be done about it. Here we can do nothing!" On another occasion I was interested and a little amazed to hear some one refer to my Svanetian friends as "very common people." Class distinctions can apparently exist among Communists, as much as in a Capitalist country, and perhaps

Georgians are even more class-conscious than the average Russian.

Over dinner in the hotel restaurant we listened to the speeches at the banquet given by the Georgian football team to their Dutch opponents of the afternoon, whom they had beaten. We reluctantly tore ourselves away to pack, and finished only just in time, to be ready for the car which awaited us before midnight to drive us to the station. A new Intourist guide, a pleasant girl, came with us, and on the platform we found five representatives of the Georgian Alpine Club waiting to see us off. Mr Alexei, of course, was there, and presented us with two bottles of Georgian wine, while Alexandria Djapharidze greeted us with a present of two white goat's-hair wide-brimmed hats for use in climbing in the hot sun of Georgia. I remembered how the climbers of the Central Caucasus had despised these as 'tourist hats' not to be worn by real climbers, but, of course, I kept this knowledge to myself! Two young men whom we had not seen before presented us with nosegays of flowers and asked for our autographs. The fifth representative, a woman surgeon, told us of her climbing in the Pamirs that summer and pressed us to return another year to climb with her. Wishful thinking?

At this point a porter came up, carrying all our six pieces at once, a feat of balance as well as of strength, but porters are paid by the piece, and he was anxious to collect all six dues. The train came in at the same time, and he found our places in a new coach, the only one going all the way to the frontier. As the train steamed out of the station we waved until we could no longer see the little group of five representatives of this virile, hospitable country, which we were now leaving for a more barren land.

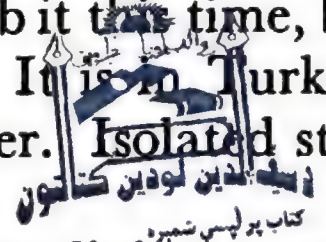
When we came to look around we found that we were in a compartment for two with washing accommodation equal to any on the trans-European lines. The German-speaking guard thought nothing of the construction of the German-built coach. The corridors, he said, were too narrow for porters to walk along with the luggage in their hands, the doors of the compartments opened outward, and the beds were so narrow that there was a danger that the travellers would fall out in the night. He



said that Russian-built coaches had wide corridors, sliding doors, and comfortable berths, and, indeed, this was our experience. We soon settled down on the bunks, but were jolted unmercifully as the long train swung round corners and mounted steep inclines on a rough rail-track, and could only catch intermittent sleep between the many stops at stations. During the night the temperature fell considerably, and for once we needed a blanket over us.

By 8 A.M. we were up and out in the corridor gazing at a line of bald hills about two miles away, through which a pale sun occasionally reached us, warming the air a little. Between us and the hills the land was cultivated or given over to rough pasture. Small boys were guarding mixed flocks of sheep and goats, and families of geese wandered at their will. Men were already working in the fields planted with wheat and sun-flowers or in the vegetable gardens round their little cottages. Our friendly attendant of the evening before now appeared and opened a corner cupboard of the corridor. This disclosed an immaculate, cream-coloured enamel tea-urn, and by its side a galaxy of electric knobs; nevertheless he had to fetch coal from a near-by bunker to light a fire under the urn to provide us with tea!

By the time we had drunk the tea and eaten biscuits from our stores the valley had widened and vegetation increased. The river-beds were all dry, and the bare hills around were eroded and unfit for pasture. Eleanor provided a little excitement on this rather dull part of the journey by announcing that she could not find a cotton bag in which she carried her personal effects and, most important of all, her diary. Reflection suggested that this had been left in the hands of one of the Georgians who had held it while she mounted the steps of the carriage. Gloom reigned for half an hour, at the end of which she rushed into the next compartment, and emerged triumphant, clasping the bag. She had had the sudden thought that it was from this compartment that she had waved farewell the night before, and had deposited the bag on a seat so as to have both hands free. Fortunately the compartment had been unoccupied—indeed, we seemed to be the only travellers in the whole coach.

As the sun gained strength the train got steadily warmer, and by midday we were glad to have all the windows open to get the benefit of the breeze as we raced along the valley. For twenty minutes the train ran close to a snow-capped peak standing quite apart and considerably higher than the surrounding mountains, a cone obviously of volcanic origin. Ararat! We could not climb it ~~this~~ time, but at least we had seen it from the Russian side. It is in Turkey, but is very near the Russian-Turkish frontier.  Isolated stands a small replica of the mountain.

There was no dining-car on the train, so we ate biscuits and corned beef in our compartment and "Ivan" brought us more tea. At Epeban all the other passengers descended, leaving us and our coach to be switched on to a side-line and connected to another train which was travelling farther south. We had the same guard, and during the long stop he told us something of his life. All his family were wiped out during the War at the destruction of the industrial town of Orel, and only he, a child of ten, escaped. He was taken care of by various Russian families until he joined the Soviet Army and went with it to the siege of Leningrad. After the War he married and settled in Moscow, and is now a supporter of the regime which he believes will give him security and peace.

Outside Epeban acres and acres of land were under cultivation with tomatoes, the great big fleshy ones not found in our own country. It was full summer here, and men and women were out in the fields gathering in the harvest. Tiring of looking at that continuous market garden, we whiled away the time doing a crossword, and when we next looked up the scene had changed. Now all was desolation, and the overriding colour was khaki—the land was dried mud, and the tiny houses were fashioned of the same material. Nothing seemed to grow in this desert, and in the afternoon, with the temperature approaching 100 degrees Fahrenheit, nobody was out of doors.

We were approaching the frontier, and at 7 P.M. the train pulled up in a small station with many sidings. Our coach was shunted into one of these, and a Customs officer boarded it. He did not examine our luggage, but was only interested in

passports. Then followed an Intourist official, who, after much argument, took away our Russian tickets, and gave us a piece of paper which, he said, would take us to Teheran.

We were next invited to go to the station restaurant for dinner. This looked very uninviting from the outside, but the manager ushered us into a smart private room where a table was set for two. He served us an excellent meal of water-melon, beefsteak, tomatoes and onions, salad, fruit, and tea. This we paid for in coupons amounting to 30 roubles (about £1), and we still had enough coupons left for another day's meals, although we hoped to have crossed the frontier before morning. It was obvious, however, that we were to spend the night in the siding, so we returned to our lonely bunks in the *wagon-lit*; by ten o'clock it was cool enough to seek sleep.

Early the next morning we were escorted with our luggage to the Customs office, where the official, having nothing else to do, insisted that all the bags should be completely emptied and the contents spread out for his examination. He passed lightly over the more intimate objects of clothing, but paused in consideration over books and papers. All of these were put out in a separate pile, the Royal Geographical Society's *Hints to Travelers* and its accompanying notebooks being subsequently taken with our cameras and all films, used and unused, to an inner room. We were invited to enter this office, where a higher-ranking officer sat in state. He had put on one side the films, and, to our relief, said "O.K." He then pointed to the camera and asked us to take out the partly used films. I refused to do this, and a lengthy conversation ensued during which he remained adamant. He thought the only possible reason for my refusal to hand over the film to him was that I did not understand his request, so he sent for an interpreter. The latter was not to be found, and two hours elapsed before he arrived. The first officer tried to be helpful, and made conversation with the aid of my Russian-English dictionary. His method was to think of a sentence, look up each word in the dictionary, putting slips of paper in each requisite page, and, at the end, read out the result. This was, on the whole, surprisingly successful, and he managed to convey "Wind film back—open camera—give to captain—post." I nodded my understanding of this and



willingness to co-operate, but the next sentence read, "Shoot the captain," and to this I obviously could not agree! Presumably his finger had slipped on to the wrong line!

When the French-speaking interpreter finally arrived I agreed to give the films to the commanding officer, on his assurance that after the examination they would be posted to any address in England I should like to give. In the interval he had forgotten all about his suspicions of the books and handed them back. In any case, while he was otherwise occupied Eleanor had quietly taken back the notebooks of surveying calculations which would appear to be the most incriminating, and were the most valuable to us!

One more piece of officialdom remained. We were not allowed to take roubles into Iran, and as 50 remained to us we were escorted to the station stall to spend them. There was nothing worth buying, but, to comply with the rules, we bought a box of chocolates at an extortionate price. (They were crawling with maggots after a week.) At last we were ready to cross the frontier.

# 4

## *Persian Interlude*

**A**FTER all the commotion of the Customs in Djolfa station it seemed like progress to get ourselves and our luggage into a taxi for the tiny distance to the Frontier Bridge across the river Araks (Araxes), flowing parallel to the railway. It was a grim-looking scene, apart from the landscape. The Persian desert land, beyond their side of the sandy, sluggish river, with barbed wire everywhere, looked far less forbidding in its natural wildness than the stocky Russian guards with sub-machine guns 'at the ready,' glaring through iron bars about fifteen feet high, reminiscent of the lion cages at the Zoo, facing the much more handsome but no less menacing tall Iranians in 'tin hats' with fixed bayonets on the other side. (How different from the casual way in the Alps: one gets from France to Switzerland, or vice versa, through a low gate suggesting a level-crossing, or no gate at all.)

We expected to be allowed to pass at once, all formalities, we thought, being over—but no, we stood in the grilling heat as an Iranian Army officer (a major) arrived and shook hands with the Russian captain—through the bars! Then there seemed to be endless consultations. At one point the Iranian beckoned to me with a charming smile to come through a small gate now slightly ajar in the massive, iron-barred structure. But I was politely but firmly pressed back by the Russian, and consultations seemed to begin all over again! At last the taxi was allowed through, and we travelled the first few yards of Iranian territory to the meagre few houses (not really a village) which they call Djolfa. Here we were thankful, after the blazing sun, to get some fresh drinking water and to sit looking, from the little refreshment room of this outpost, at a cool garden.

We had rail tickets straight through to Teheran, but anything as simple as that was not to be, and I cannot honestly say that I minded; apparent setbacks are usually a challenge, and, in such as this strange mischance, often result in some exciting

new adventure. There had been a landslide, due to heavy rains, between Djolfa and Tabriz, and no trains would get through for at least three days. Then, almost in the same breath, we were told there was nowhere for us to stay, where we now were, but that a taxi to take us the two or three hundred kilometres would cost a very great deal because of the risk to the car, and, in any case, anything like a van or even a jeep was really too light a vehicle to cross this stony desert. Eventually it was found that a heavy lorry, loaded with scrap-iron, would be going the rough journey: we could avail ourselves of that, very cheaply, for transport to Tabriz.

At 3.40 P.M. on that broiling, late July day Joyce and I squeezed into the cab with the driver and his son—two Armenians, of a good type—and off we went. After a check-point or two the road ended. We were into the desert, with its rocky ranges of dark mountains all round. Light was fading, and I christened the landscape the “Abomination of Desolation” (not that it did not attract me enormously by its very wildness and sinister gloom).

I was quite literally black and blue after this wild ride. It was worth the pains, however. The Armenian was a fine driver, but we shot down innumerable hair-raising declines, into dried river-beds, and somehow up the other side. I was banged against the metal door. Joyce had at least the padding of me and the driver, but suffered from a cramped leg for some time after. There were strange numbers of birds about, some beautiful and quite unknown to us. The only animal I saw was a large, handsome fox surveying the rocky ‘rubble’ and sandy wastes. There were probably other animals, in hiding, in the mountains always in view, for here and there were “the loathly birds,” as Ralph Hodgson describes the vultures, “waiting for the flesh that dies.”

There were hardly discernible tracks, but our driver seemed to take them by instinct. At long last we struck a road, of the corrugated variety, going to Marand, and saw our first human beings outside the lorry for some hours—two men in a Volkswagen (from “Deutschland”). Arrived at Marand, a fair-sized village or small town, we halted for refreshment and refuelling. Joyce and I had merely a raging thirst, an omen perhaps of



what we should later endure in Iran, and were lucky in getting bottles of "Canada Dry," which we felt to be safe liquid, in the friendly but not too clean café. Our two companions disposed of enormous mountains of rice with bits of meat. All of us refreshed, and Joyce and I glad to stretch our aching limbs, we pressed on in the darkness. At a little collection of dark dwellings, at about 9 P.M., our driver asked if we would like to stay here for the night. We said no—it must be Tabriz, and he obligingly agreed.

Tabriz had never been on our agenda. It was all so novel and exciting, this wild-looking terrain and our wilder ride. I bridged the years back to childhood in a quite charming classroom (in my private school) where I was laboriously drawing sketch-maps of the railways of Russia and the East, and reciting quite meaninglessly to myself, "Tiflis, Tabriz, Teheran"—I liked the euphonious sound—and filling in the dotted lines! How little did I think I should ever be on that route; and this bit was far more thrilling than being in a mere train and travelling in comparatively civilized comfort.

At last we neared Tabriz, a beautiful semicircle of brilliant light in the darkness. We had, on our strange drive, been stopped at as many as six military check-points once we got on to roads of sorts; and though we had been regarded, quite obviously, as an odd pair, no difficulties had been put in our way. Now we were really arriving at last. We had been given the name of a small hotel by an Iranian Customs official. Although we could not read the name of the one to which our driver took us, we were quite sure by its location that it was *not* the one to which we had been directed (perhaps this would have meant some detour for the lorry). Possibly it was little worse, but it was certainly pretty low in any category.

The few rooms opened off a courtyard, in which many people were already sleeping on beds or rugs. The room we were given had two beds, with rugs, and was not too clean; but we were too glad to be able to 'stretch out' to mind. The door would not shut, and neither would the door-like window. But there was actually a tap in the yard, and we were able to freshen up before sleeping.

Joyce thought we had better leave the window open for some

air, and barricade the door, which led into another little room (apparently unoccupied), which, in turn, gave on to the courtyard. Hardly had we settled down when a dark form loomed up in the window. Joyce was already practically asleep, but I leapt out of bed with a cry, to find that a large sheep wished to share our sleeping quarters. Chivying it out, I informed Joyce we must do with less air! And, feeling that we were equally exposed to human visitors, I propped the window open only a few inches and made an erection of luggage and cooking utensils to make entry more troublesome and give warning of any approach. I then settled down to uneasy rest. Sleep had barely overcome my fears when the *door* burst open, and the resultant clatter of our barricade and my almost simultaneous scream awoke Joyce. We made an exploration, but there was no one there. My third effort to sleep ended in a nightmare and my giving a terrible shriek which really frightened Joyce, and woke me; and it was now her turn to leap up, thinking I was being murdered in my bed—which was just what I had thought myself! Actually the collapse of my window erection must have started my evil dream. However, morning came at last, and, as there was no such thing as a restaurant, we ‘picnicked’ in the room. Afterwards we were requested to go and give an account of ourselves to the police.

It was very hot, and the walk proved a long one, though interesting, but the police office requiring us was tucked away in a lovely cool garden, an ‘oasis,’ on the outskirts of the broiling city with its teeming thousands, and we were politely received. We were asked, however (in French), to produce two further photographs each of ourselves. Joyce had two; I happened to have only one in my handbag, and it seemed as if things were going to be difficult. However, the officer studied my passport, and when he saw the word ‘musician’ his face became wreathed in smiles, and, obviously an enthusiast, he talked of the piano and music in general—thereafter saying it would be quite in order having only one photograph!

Paying the hotel bill assumed the proportions of a battle. Luckily we had been told what we *should* pay for the rather better hotel suggested, and when this one proved to be three times that amount I refused to pay: Joyce had asked me to do

the arguing. The proprietor 'came down' a little, but I stuck to my guns. Voices rose, people from outside crowded into the open vestibule; I decided it was time *we got out!* The man threw my money down; I picked it up! Then he changed his mind and reached out for it. I dumped it on the table, and we made a bee-line for our waiting taxi, in which, with great forethought, we had previously put our luggage! People jumped on the running-board and hung in at the windows! We managed at last to shake them off, and were driven off at speed. That hotel was very well paid, and the owner knew it. He will also probably register considerably more respect for Great Britain in future. The lion's tail cannot always be twisted, even by the professional 'twister.'

Leaving our luggage at the station, we next wandered the main streets and back alleys of Tabriz, interest and beauty and hideous squalor intermingled. Then we decided we would have lunch at the 'best' hotel—this was not saying much, but it was a good and quite cheap meal, with a pleasant sequel, for two Britons at the next table (from Abadan and Edinburgh University, it transpired) got into conversation with us, and said we really *should* call on Mr and Mrs Harold Popplestone, of the British Council.

The men took us by car to another 'oasis,' with a lovely garden in a quiet street, off the main, noisy highways. We were welcomed and immediately made to feel like old friends, thoroughly at home, in charming, cultivated surroundings. To be offered hot baths and showers was to us, after our weird travel and 'weirder' hotel, with the temperature 96 degrees in the shade, just the kindest thing on earth, and we accepted the offer with heartfelt thanks. Our much-needed ablutions were followed by refreshments in the cool sitting-room, with interesting people coming and going.

We really were much impressed by the enthusiasm and keenness with which these people were pursuing their cultural work for the Council, among the more backward Iranians, not regarding it all as 'just a job,' but with some sense of mission, which was achieving real results—in Tabriz, anyhow. One is well aware of the usual jibes at the Council regarding the waste of money, probably by those who have never once seen any of



their work, at close quarters. At the Popplestones' we also had the pleasure of meeting Mr Arthur Kellas, from the British Embassy in Teheran; and this contact was to have results of some importance later. Transport in a Land Rover was 'laid on' for us to the station; and we left by train for Teheran early that evening.

We had a very comfortable sleeper (third class), Belgian rolling-stock, with two pleasant companions—a young Iranian (who gave us further useful information on what we *ought* to pay porters and taxis and suchlike; and what they would ask, that we should not think of paying!) and his attractive wife, a Viennese girl, going to visit his people. At first the heat was intense, but the night became bitterly cold, with a chill wind blowing, which seemed to get into the compartment somehow. We arrived at Teheran at nine o'clock next morning, having had good food, served in the compartment for once, friendly conversation, and some rest. The scenery was not particularly interesting—rather brown and flat in general.

One happy little Pakistani traveller I shall never forget. He passed in the corridor, and, seeing that we were Europeans and talking English, he came in to speak to us. He was returning to Lahore, having paid his first visit to London; he was 'full of it'! He had stayed with a son in Fulham, and "everything was wonderful"—our shops, our police, our buses, and so on. His face radiated contentment and joy; and there was not a shade of jealousy or envy, bitterness or resentment, in his voice or words, when he said cheerily, but with conviction, what I shall always remember: "God has been *too* good to you English"!

Yes, that adverb confers a truly terrible responsibility upon us. When one sees the rest of the world one must admit that we in Great Britain have *far* more than even 'a fair share.' When, later, we found ourselves in some of the appalling slums of Lahore I seemed to see our little Pakistani as we had last seen him, after we said good-bye on the platform in Teheran station, trotting along, with a loosely rolled black umbrella, smiling happily, grateful for what he had—and, in truth, something of a seer.

Armed now with the knowledge of what we should pay for porters and taxis in Iran—and Teheran in particular—we had

another 'pitched battle' outside the station! Three porters grabbed our luggage, and the taxi-man to whom they had led us made a fourth opponent. In the end I told the porters they could fetch the police. They departed for good. I told the taxi-man what we would pay; he threw our luggage off the roof; so I got in and sat down! He could not hire the taxi so, to anyone else—so he too thought better of it! Somewhat limp, yet flushed with victory, we eventually got to a hotel that was expecting us, and where we ensconced ourselves most comfortably.

Tabriz we had visited by accident; our only real reason for making anything of a stay in Teheran was to climb Iran's highest peak, Demavend (18,600 feet), about sixty miles north-east of the capital. I had for a long time had this objective in mind, and had had some previous information about it from a Turkish friend who had climbed it as an army manoeuvre, and from a Briton, a Commando officer. Then conversation at the Popplestones' had turned upon it; one or two people had climbed it. It had seemed simplicity itself to hire a car to the nearest village, make our way to the foot, and make the ascent (there need be no really technical difficulties). Joyce had been a little dubious at first, but now was as keen as I was.

Our knowledge of Farsi was not yet very extensive, but we thought we had made it plain to hotel people and car-driver what was our objective. The Oriental is always apt to say or indicate that he understands perfectly, out of politeness, or because he cannot be bothered to try to understand further. Anyhow, on this occasion we first found ourselves at the rather smart 'suburb' of Shimran, where we could *view* some mountains at closer range. Things were explained pretty forcibly (we were in climbing clothes); and the fact that we were prepared to pay our driver seven times the fare—which, indeed, we had previously agreed to do (we had thought)—seemed to clear up the situation somewhat.

Back we went to our hotel, and started off on another road. After some time we had a view of what could only be Demavend—a huge, isolated, beautiful cone, apparently heavily snow-capped, at least on this north face. We got really excited. But our joy was short-lived. We seemed to get no nearer the peak—rather, to go off in another direction. Sure enough, after a long

time we seemed to leave the main road for good, turning right, where the mountain was on the left. But we got no sense from the driver, and in next to no time we found ourselves at a dead-end, so to speak: we had been taken to the *village* of Demavend, nowhere near the mountain of that same name. It was Sunday, and a holiday, and the place was crammed with local inhabitants, and cars from Teheran, much as on the Brighton road on a fine Sunday. In our helpless annoyance we soon gathered a crowd around us, with kindly people offering assistance. Among these was luckily a man who spoke excellent French. He and his Parisian-looking wife and little boy joined us in retracing our road, by the car, as far as his own house. There, unluckily for us, he found guests had arrived, so he could go no farther with us, but explained to the driver that he must keep to the main road, and *go on*. This the driver did, until the road turned off, to the left, into a kind of car-park. The peak had apparently vanished, of course! A new helper materialized—an Iranian who spoke German, much travelled in Germany. He and his friend got into the car(!), and soon we were back on the main road—and our driver was made to keep straight on, when the good road had given place to a more exciting mountain type of road, none too good.

At length we came to the last village, Abgarm, seventy miles from the capital. Our new friend had already treated us to tea, on the way, served on a kind of outdoor platform with rugs on which to rest. Now in this crowded village we had further hospitality—but our hopes of getting to our peak were fading. We had no wish for the huge platters of rice and meat which they generously offered us, and which they consumed with relish. We had more tea—and felt at their mercy.

No one wanted to act as a guide, and we now realized that they really wanted to do everything to dissuade us from putting our project into execution. The half-dozen different reasons they put forward for our *not* going on Kuh-i-Demavend (as we now felt it might be more distinctive to call it) were mostly so feeble that we realized they were hard put to it to think of another one as we demolished the last! It was “not safe for women to go”; there would be no danger from any Iranian, of



course(!), but there were "foreign ruffians" on the lower slopes. (This sounded implausible, and in the event was a sheer fabrication.) Then it would be no good going in our heavy boots . . . no, sandals would be better. This, of course, because *they* wore sandals, and admitted to never going themselves on a mountain, and had not seen such as our boots before. Next, the possible smell of sulphur would be so bad for us; or cloud would collect over the summit and we should have a storm! (The sky was cloudless—and, after all, there is always the risk of the unexpected.) Finally, there were no guides, though later, seeing a chance of making some money, we had two half-hearted offers at fancy prices, which we promptly rejected. We realized that Demavend was 'off,' in that day's circumstances; but "baffled, to fight better," as Browning puts it, we were undeterred, and would start plans all over again from Teheran. We were taken by our friendly 'advisers' to see a natural, near-boiling sulphur stream, and steaming bath-house, very primitive in arrangement, but much patronized, and certainly a genuine phenomenon. "Abgarm" simply means "hot water." Then we set off on the seventy miles back to Teheran.

We stopped a few times *en route*, and at one point saw a little group of people, pretty obviously American, with a couple of jeeps near by; they seemed to be studying geological specimens. We were soon chatting, and they invited us to accompany them to a ski lodge not far off, for refreshments, there to pay off our driver, and they would take us back to Teheran. New contacts mean new interest—and it was all in the way of Anglo-United States friendship! So we happily accepted their suggestion, and did not have too serious an argument with our driver. We had already dropped our German-speaking friend. Our five new friends eventually invited us to an impromptu evening party at the "apartment" of one of the two ladies. It was a very happy evening; they were in United States Government work, and Army, but had outside interests—geological, archæological, and one was apparently a quite important 'spelæologist' in his own country, and found plenty of caves in Iran.

Our hostess, Mrs Sylvia Czao, had purchased a small second-hand Erard piano in Teheran, and as well as a quite exciting little supper-party, which we all took a hand in preparing, seven

of us, out on a very large 'patio' with a splendid view of the city, we had a musical evening and singsong. I racked my memory for music from the American continent, to their great delight.

They tried to be helpful, too, over our climbing aim, and gave us the name of a Dane who might help us. In the tea-party at the ski lodge we had met the President of the Mountaineering Club of Iran; but, oddly enough, he was not a very enthusiastic individual, and offered no suggestions to further our plans. Obviously his affections were engaged with ski-ing.

Next day we lost no time, but tried to get through (un-availingly) to the Dane; then we went off to the British Embassy, in its lovely, old-world grounds, with great trees. We managed to see Mr Kellas, the Counsellor whom we had met in Tabriz. (The Ambassador was in England.) Over chai,<sup>1</sup> brought in to us, he told us we should be thus frustrated at every turn, in a friendly, would-be-helpful way, by all village people, and that the only sensible thing, seeing that we were not novices, was *to take ourselves* to some point near the peak, to avoid people, and go guideless: a so-called guide would tire long before we should, leave us in the lurch, and return home. . . .

We studied the only map available. Mr Kellas had done the traverse of the peak, and he armed us with a list of the villages (made out by the Iranian interpreter) from Teheran to Abgarm—in English, for us to pronounce, and Farsi, for the car-driver to read. Arrangements were made for us to hire a reliable man, a friend of an Embassy driver, who would put us down wherever we thought we were nearest to the base of the mountain. If things fell through we were invited to an Embassy cocktail party; we all hoped, however, it would be the mountain! And we were even loaned extra rials, for the banks closed early; and these were brought by an impressive-looking special messenger to our hotel. It was rather pleasing that the staff were obviously impressed that we were in touch with the British Embassy. Great Britain is respected.

It was an unnecessarily luxurious scarlet limousine that came for us, but Teheran is crammed with these 'aggressively rich'

<sup>1</sup> Tea.

cars, and we had already agreed on the price. It was the last comfort we were to know for five days.

We were becoming quite familiar with the road! We passed again through the villages of Rudē Hēn, Ābali, Pulūr, Emām, Zādeh Hashem; and then near Rēhneh, hanging out of the windows to see the most suitable spot, we eventually stopped our driver—and descended. The adventure began. We had both felt the heat in Iran, but both now felt ‘on top of the world,’ or, rather, ‘on top of our form,’ for getting at least to ‘the top of Iran.’

We struck off the road on a shepherd’s track, and the peak seemed even then to dominate us. The time was 5.20 P.M., and we were swinging along on an almost level path, intending to bivouac early, for the next day’s assault. We had not been going fifteen minutes, when I tripped over a bootlace (my right foot on a left lace)—and measured my length on the ground. Intending to camp, we had not really dressed yet for serious climbing. Joyce had put on her boots over thin stockings; I had fastened mine casually, not carefully giving that extra tie to the knot. What a warning, for life! It all happened in a trice, and as I got to my feet I realized that the so-called third finger (‘fourth’ to a pianist) of my right hand was hanging limp, but gave little pain; the pain was everywhere but there. (I learned, six days later, that there were five fractures—in three fingers and the palm of the hand.)

However, for me, this was a point of no return, and we went on till it grew dusk, the tracks having become real mountain ones; and when we saw an enormous boulder which would give good shelter, though the evening was just pleasantly warm, we decided this would be our night’s resting-place.

We had passed near where some Army manœuvres were taking place, and now at intervals, high above us, the dark sky was illuminated by occasional swift-passing green lights, like some meteors from another world. We had been told by our friends in Tabriz that wolves were pretty numerous in the mountains, and were often of great size—our hostess had herself seen unusually large ones. But Demavend, though part of the Elburtz chain, was isolated, and I thought nothing about possible ‘visitors’ from the animal kingdom, until, in the light



of a passing flare, I saw some very large animal standing out, motionless, on the skyline, ears pricked up. I watched, fascinated, for I could see the silhouette without artificial light. Then suddenly, with a howl which reverberated weirdly from ridge to ridge, it bounded away, vanishing into the gloom. Either its howl or my excited exclamation woke Joyce, who could fall asleep quickly. Perhaps it was only a dog belonging to some shepherd, but I never saw one that shape or size again. With something of a shudder I had cowered farther under the boulder; it was all so lonely—but I had no fears, and thereafter, in spite of my aching hand, I found sleep as I was not to know it for the next few days. The date was July 30.

We continued upward, having started as soon as there was just enough light, next morning. The sunrise was one of the most glorious I have ever seen; we seemed to be surrounded by a cloudlike floor of undulating white cotton-wool, touched here and there with ruby colour from a gigantic, glowing red bulb of light. We had expected to find water—our bottles were soon empty—but there was none to be found. I had had a touch of dysentery with the heat and germs of the cities; I did not feel well now, and almost forgot my hand; a raging thirst was beginning to consume me. The previous day, when we had caught a distant glimpse of herdsmen, I had said to Joyce (remembering Mr Kellas's advice), "Let's avoid them." Now, when seeing shepherds on a ridge, I surprised her by my complete change of tactics, saying we must get to them (and possibly chai). We did manage to reach them, six men in all, and they immediately most hospitably *offered* us tea, and the first mouthful was as the nectar of the gods to me. They had a fire, and then they kept on making further supplies, also most generously offering their bread and curd cheese. I drank three beakers of tea; Joyce two; and then they kindly filled our water-bottles to the brim. All they would take in return was—a few fruit gums (which they seemed much to appreciate). Joyce photographed the sextet, which also gave them joy. In their rags and with their rather wild faces they might look like brigands; to me each wore the halo of the Good Samaritan.

Temporarily much revived, we carried on, seeming to cross endless ridges, sometimes with awkward rock climbs. No

sooner had we tried a new likely one than we found it was as 'unattached' as the last—and by evening we seemed hardly any nearer the peak. We saw a rocky ridge that would provide a bivouac site; Joyce said cheerfully, "That rock shaped like a coffin would be good to lie in." The rather gruesome simile had the ring of prophecy in it, when one considered what happened later. The 'coffin' proved too high up and exposed; but under its end we settled down—or, rather, endeavoured to do so. A shepherd's dog came fairly near, sniffed and disliked us—and barked nearly all night. Joyce had bound up my hand, but it was swelling up; and, afraid of frostbite from the tightness, I removed the bandage; the hand was in a bad way, and after digging up plants which smelt so unpleasant that they kept me awake I fell into a sleep that I really think was a kind of delirium.

We neither of us could bear the thought of any of the food we had brought with us. We had drunk all our tea, and thirst had returned. I had a craving for fruit, Joyce a strange desire for eggs and bacon! No sooner had I fallen into some sort of stupor than I dreamed and believed that there was a large sow snorting near us, with a litter of little pigs: I think a snoring shepherd across the ridge had got involved with the 'bacon.' The night grew very cold—and I next was certain I had been packed into a "Cellophane" box, of which the lid would not fit at the corners and the cold air got into it. Hardly had I convinced myself that I was in a very cold 'bed' when I seemed to receive a visit from some one telling me how stupid I was not to remember I had a rucksack, *full* of bananas: one slice of banana would have been welcome. My last hallucination before we rose at 4 A.M. was that several American soldiers were offering me endless drinks of water. (This was also somewhat prophetic, for we were later to owe American Army men a very great debt for reviving us from near-extinction.) No psychiatrist nor psychologist was needed to explain my dreams.

The vigilant eyes of the once snoring shepherd had found us, and he was watching us from the skyline. Joyce was now feeling pretty poorly too; and we called weakly to him, "Chai?" He nodded, came towards us, and beckoned. We followed him to a rough enclosure of loose stones beyond which his numerous sheep grazed. With the courtliness of a Sir Walter Raleigh he

spread his ragged cloak on the ground and motioned us to sit down. He soon collected a mass of brushwood and got a fire going. The water he took from an Iranian Oil Company's drum! What matter? It was to be boiled. We each drank three beakers full of the wonderful, positively life-giving tea. He gladly filled our water-bottles too.

Suddenly he pointed to my unbandaged right hand, touching the swelling which he had noted. I produced my bandage from a pocket, but indicated it was not good. Silently he went to a cleft in the rocks and produced some rough salt. He then tested drops of tea, to gauge the heat, and put a little on the back of my hand. He next put a layer of salt on the most swollen part, and made it sodden and warm with the liquid. Then he took the bandage from me and bound up the fingers, hand, and wrist, gently and expertly. It was the greatest comfort I had known since I smashed the hand.

We tried to press on, seeing far below us in the valley the water of a little stream below the glacier; we had to cross only a dried-up bed. We had been going some time when I found my precious 'windjammer' was missing. I remembered tying it on to me when we left the shepherd. Owing to a misunderstanding it seemed that Joyce thought the only thing was for me to retrace my steps, because it would be so cold later. She sat down, not loath to rest; and I reluctantly endeavoured to follow our boot-prints back as far as the now deserted enclosure. I never found the jacket; it was two and a half hours wasted, and worse, for I was now dead tired, and, though unusually tough as a rule, pain and thirst had weakened my powers of resistance considerably. We knew at last, however, that the snowline was nearer, and altitude seemed to make little difference.

Seeing a rude, circular 'hut' of stones, probably the highest any shepherd would go, we decided to make that our third bivouac; it had a roof of sorts, but we had to lie 'in curves,' and got very stiff; previously we had tried vainly to find snow or ice to melt. On our hunt it actually began to snow, but the flakes did not lie, and hardly *one* benefited our thirst; and for myself, with no windjammer, it was best to crawl into the 'hut,' and Joyce soon did the same: certainly our *warmest* night.



In the morning we saw gigantic icicles on a rocky ridge, and made them our goal. They were a long way off; but before reaching them Joyce found some ice, and then I found some more; with this melted we cooked some hot vegetable soup. The internal heat was comforting at the time, but neither of us could really stomach the soup; tea replenished our water-bottles.

The huge icicles kept breaking off as the sun rose, crashing down dangerously, with eerie reverberations. There were scattered flocks of sheep almost to this point, surefootedly searching for salt, we guessed—for this is all part of a great salt desert; and yet there were more flowers (including the lovely deep-red poppy sought for opium) than on the lower slopes.

At last the col was reached, after a day's slow progress. This was probably at nearly 18,000 feet, and we dumped our rucksacks. Determination to reach the summit or die in the effort (*not* a sane idea) seemed to give me a very strange and quite inexplicable new lease of life. Joyce tried a rock climb, and vanished 'over the top.' I surveyed the possibilities, and, with only one sound hand, realized it would be lunacy for me to follow. We had been advised that a rope would be a burden and of little help. I quickly took in the situation of a snow *arête* flanked by strange pumice-like yellow rock, leading apparently almost directly to the summit crater. This proved to be no more than a steep grind, and I plodded on. The light was failing very rapidly, and I had no sooner set foot on the huge, hammock-like summit of dust and pumice than I turned, to get back to our rucksacks before total darkness. There was little 'view' left—but on a clear day it is said that one can see the Caspian Sea. The snow was far lower on the north face. There is a book to sign, under the cairn. I did not wait to dig that out; though triumphant, I was rather scared that I should be engulfed by the swiftly descending night. It was not difficult to follow the snow downward at a reasonable speed; it was strangely imprinted with innumerable bird-claw marks, some very large. I got back to the rucksacks to see Joyce already there. Her rock route had apparently been a quicker one. We had never met.

It was far too cold to sleep out at this height. Oddly enough,

at the very point where I had suddenly had such a strange access of strength for the final assault—it left me. It was as if I had been allowed to achieve my cherished dream. It was after 7 P.M.; we must descend a couple of thousand feet to bivouac. There was a half-moon, and we decided to make a more direct descent by the side of the glacier. It was a somewhat dangerous proceeding, particularly after our one torch gave out, for the route was over very loose volcanic rock, slag, and scree. At length, ironically, we were soaked by having to wade through the very waters for which we had so earnestly longed. To add still farther to our woes, I had twisted my left leg and removed quite a chunk of flesh from it. So progress was again slowed down. We had filled our bottles, but soon left the stream far behind. We had drunk greedily; it seemed impossible to assuage thirst adequately on this grim mountain.

Worn out, we lay down in an exposed, stony gully near the glacier. Our water again finished, I remember asking Joyce for the last drop of brandy, to moisten my parched mouth and lips. The flask had been practically empty when we started, and a wet cork, and the smell, alone remained: just as well, perhaps, with our empty stomachs.

We got up, stiff and aching with cold, at first light. Joyce said she saw a path, but when I looked I said, “No, that is the road”—which it was—thousands of feet below us. At least it gave one hope—but it seemed never any nearer, though we continued painfully to descend until dusk. There were no real difficulties, but I was hardly able to put one foot past the other, for the dysentery had returned; and, starving yet unable to swallow, all I wanted was to lie down and sleep never to wake again. I now know that what leads up to ‘death from exhaustion’ can be the greatest agony of pain and weakness, but beyond a certain point one could hardly ask for a gentler passing. But, naturally, Joyce—much less far gone than I was—had no mind to leave me (however strangely happy in my repose when I had dropped down to almost instantaneous sleep) to rot on this ill-disposed mountain. One way and another she got me to go on, no matter how slowly.

I have thought often, since then, of the words of the American Army officer to whom eventually we owed so much for help and

resuscitation: "*Now* you will know just how our boys, and your British ones, felt when they dropped out of those 'death-marches,' glad to die." Yes, perhaps it does us good very occasionally to be able *actually* to enter into the sufferings of others, not just to 'sympathize,' as an outsider. (How glad I was, too, even in my weakness, to notice that, unlike the rather typical American war-story film, he mentioned the British as well as his own countrymen!)

We had come to the dried bed of a stream between two steep-sided ridges; this seemed to us as good a place as any to pass a brief fifth night. We now saw a few sheep on the skyline—perhaps there was a shepherd somewhere, with water or chai. Joyce said not to move from the spot where she left me, and she would climb up at an easy place and see if any human being was about. Perhaps what happened next was more fortunate than it seemed—to prevent my dropping into a sort of near permanent coma.

Thick white mist was rolling up the valley, and seemed, like the silence, to envelop me. I fell into a dreamless sleep, hoping even then that I should never wake. Then something seemed to disturb me. I roused myself, and then heard the most unearthly shriek, from above me, and it echoed horribly from ridge to ridge in the otherwise deathly stillness. In a second I was like another person, with weakness temporarily vanished. I started praying, horrified not frightened, and thinking Joyce had been attacked, was possibly dead. Our Afghan expedition was over before it had begun. How should I get her body down? I must get down to the road as soon as there was any daylight, leaving markers on the route, and get help; it would be foolhardy of me to search alone in case I was attacked too, and no one would ever know. And so on.

Then, like a sudden answer to my instinctive first prayer, I heard my name, "Eleanor!" called distinctly from the opposite side of the gully, and it was quite near; and in a moment I saw Joyce on a rock below me, to my left. Was there ever a more welcome sight! She descended—and with some water!

She told me that she had gone a long way with no sign of life—when a shaggy sheepdog came bounding up, and, with much tail-wagging, took her to where there were two tiny



puppies. Two shepherds arrived, and one had gone a long way to fetch the water.

I shall never quite understand that ghastly scream. It was not a trick of my imagination, for Joyce said she *had* called out, from higher up, soon after her departure—to reassure me! Some trick of sound or echo had converted the wordless cry, to me, into something like the anguish of one *in extremis*.

Joyce joined me in sleep. About 6 A.M.—it was August 4—we got up, and I made a last effort, and I knew now that I was in a desperate plight. I begged Joyce to get to a herdsman again, for there were further flocks. A rather well-dressed shepherd in a peaked cap beckoned us to cross to another ridge. I lay down, and Joyce vanished for a moment, to reappear with another man and his wife, and five children! They brought hot tea; and the woman held a large wooden bowl, full of pure white goat's-milk curd, as it proved to be. She dipped a piece of rough bread into the ice-cold curd, and tried to feed me. I could not manage the solid, but dug my dirty fingers greedily, over and over again, into the wonderful, cool 'food and drink' in one, as the plump, handsome, dark-eyed woman, with smooth henna-dyed hair, held it out to me. She was a peasant, but neatly clothed in her Oriental garments—and a pair of strong British shoes, I am certain!

The man meantime brought along a donkey, and I was put on it. A bargain was struck, and coins were given to the children; the grand little beast began to pick its way daintily down the last thousand feet of our mountain. As we neared the road we had seen, so long ago, we saw a large collection of hutments and well-built bungalows, and boards proclaiming "Jones Construction Company." Actually we landed on the road near a village pond, with gaily dressed village children playing round it. Dismounting, I lay down beside it, and some kindly soul put a flat stone under my head, resting on damp earth. On a nearby stall Joyce had found bottles of "Coca-Cola," which we were soon consuming. I had never thought to see the day when that drink would taste the most wonderful in the world! The man with the donkey was paid off gratefully; and a man and woman in a stationary lorry seemed to think we should be taken to "the camp," and we advanced no arguments against this.

We were most kindly received by Captain Glenn McIntosh, from North Carolina, the Commandant of the camp, which was doing work for the Iranian Army. We were taken into a dining-room and told there was a Danish chef! What would we like? Joyce said, "Well, what have you got?" The reply was, "Anything you like!" and it was virtually true! At that moment our wants were very few and simple, but when the men came in it seemed there was every luxury with which tins and refrigerators—of which there seemed to be many—could furnish them, here in the wilds, near desert and mountain.

After we had had a little soup and fruit and coffee Captain McIntosh, who was proud of his Scottish forebears (they were Glaswegians), most kindly said, "Now, there are no women in this camp, but you're welcome to the use of my house. You can have the place to yourselves for a good sleep and rest; and there are showers there, and a fridge, with drinks. Then, say about five o'clock, I'll come and see that you get back comfortably to Teheran."

The bedroom in the bungalow was fresh-looking, cool, and functional; two comfortable beds with soft rugs looked most inviting. (A huge refrigerator and showers were in an adjoining room.) There were but two personal things—on a bedside table: an alarm clock and a beautifully bound Bible—which seemed to suggest in a flash, to me, at first glance, the words, "Watch and Pray"! If ever there was a Christian act, this answer to the injunction to "show hospitality without grudging" was it. How grateful we were it would be hard for anyone to know.

Two different, beautiful girls in Iranian dress came silently in with clean laundry on two occasions, otherwise we were left to our slumbers or rest until nearly seven o'clock. Then, to our pleased surprise, we found that the British Embassy had really been bothering about us. Mr Kellas had rung up our Teheran hotel, after three days, to inquire if we had returned safely; when it got to five days he had alerted the *gendarmerie*, having gone himself the whole seventy miles to Abgarm with a Land Rover. Now he had landed at the camp by a lucky chance.

So we had further fine refreshments, for which we were now

much more ready, and prepared to leave. It seemed as if every whim were to be satisfied now, for I had murmured to Joyce that what I really longed for was ice-cream, such as we had had at our hotel in Teheran. Whether by coincidence or to please us—almost immediately—enormous bowls, like wash-basins, appeared, filled with luscious ice-cream! Mr Kellas then took us back to Teheran.

Sleep that night did miracles for both of us, and next morning neither of us was in a hurry to get up; but, as I, through illness, seemed to have more leeway to make up, Joyce suggested that I should stay in bed, while she tried to book seats on a plane to Mashad, in two days' time—to make up a little for the extra time we had taken in this part of Iran.

I slept on, and Joyce was successful; both of us were now relieved of all worry for the time being. I got up, and we paid a social call on the wife of Captain Glenn McIntosh, living with a friend in a U.S. Embassy flat near by. Both of them were working in the Teheran offices of the Jones Construction Company. The kind welcome and hospitality of Mrs McIntosh and Mrs Lewis rounded off our happy return to civilization. It was beside the point to reproach ourselves. It had just so happened that 1960 was one of the rarest of years, when Demavend had only a few hundred feet of snow—instead of the three or four *thousand* usually covering this appalling volcanic slag-heap.

Most of the next day was occupied with medical consultations and X-rays and getting my hand into plaster—all in different places in Teheran, people of various nationalities being involved! Multiple fractures (five in all) had been diagnosed; but with reasonable care the hand would be out of plaster before our leaving Kabul for the Hindu Kush, we calculated. Final visits to the British Embassy, and the bank, left us ready to start off on our early flight to Mashad, the holy city of Iran.

Meherabad Airport, outside Teheran, is modern and with elegant buildings. The Iranair flight took about two hours, over brown, rocky, sandy scenery, hardly varying. Mashad seemed another world, after the modernity of most of Teheran, with its British-made buses, and shops with modern goods. It was a far cry from the well-tailored Iranian businessmen of the



capital to their bearded brothers in flowing robes and round cloth caps that predominated in Mashad—where by far the greatest number of women were veiled and only the young girls wore modern dress. It was *very* hot on arrival at the not very large airport, and our wait in the rather ancient bus seemed unnecessarily long. But a kind young boy offered us wrapped sweets, and went and fetched water for us to drink, which we acknowledged most gratefully, but did not dare to drink.

We settled in at a small hotel, and soon found that we must stay three days, in order to get a connexion at the Afghan frontier for Herat; this Afghan bus ran only on Wednesdays! However, we would learn more of Iran, or 'Persia,' here, for the name of antiquity seemed better suited to this city!

As it was just round the corner, we called at the British Council headquarters, at first, deserted, being Sunday. (On a later occasion we met the British representative, and an advanced student who was helpful regarding bus travel.) But on this particular evening, in the library there, we found a young Iranian lad, most anxious to practise his (reasonably good) English! So thereafter he practically attached himself to us as an unofficial guide!

Mahomet Teherani began this first evening by taking us to see a small but pleasant park with fine trees and fountains, where the modern youth of Mashad—girls with 'can-can' skirts and youths with American shirts (in strange contrast to their robed, and veiled, fathers and mothers!)—promenaded. We visited the small museum, where specimens of local stone, jewels, and silverwork were displayed, and a very modern bank and post-office were pointed out. We were kept away from even a prolonged *look* at the outsides of the mosques—the one great one connected with the Prophet's son, in particular. This holy city does not encourage visitors to view their heritage closely; and, as women, we felt we should be specially unwelcome, so we restrained our curiosity. (Women cannot go to the money-changers because they would have to pass through the Mosque Approach—lovely from afar, with its blue tiles and gold.) Haroun al Raschid's tomb is also here.

Watching the bakers at work was really a compensation!

Five men always seemed to work at the 'hole in the floor' (about 12 feet deep by 5 or 6 feet in diameter), with its fierce flame, at the bottom, narrowed to about 2 feet wide. One man makes dough balls; a second flattens them; a third stretches them thinly; a fourth shapes them to the proportions and design of an outsize headless kipper, or yellow haddock! The fifth man puts them on a damped cushion and then slaps them on to the sides of the deep hole!

A confectioner's shop was of equal interest—and I thought of Flecker's *Hassan*, and seemed to hear the music of Delius. Persian sweetmeats—the tiny cakes and 'sweets'—must be the most sickly-sweet in the world! Having seen how quite pleasantly they were made, we chose many of the almost innumerable varieties—for they are not expensive. But even *my* very sweet tooth was defeated; and not a few of these sweetmeats grew sticky and had to be thrown away!

Through Mahomet Teherani, on the following day, we did have the privilege of seeing over their Reza Shah Hospital, the gift of their former potentate; all the treatment is free. It stands in very fine grounds which are being extended, as are the actual buildings. We were received by the "Director," who even had tea brought in for us, in little silver-handled glasses. He was most pleased that we were interested, and gave instructions that we were to be taken wherever we liked in the hospital. At present there are about five hundred beds (ninety surgical). By our standards some things are rather primitive, and some of the nurses looked a little harassed, and the bed linen not always exactly new. But when one saw some of the pathetic wrecks of human beings, old and young, arriving there, it was good to feel there was this much effort to cope with the suffering of this teeming city. We talked at some length with an enthusiastic young Iranian surgeon who had received training in Edinburgh, Blackpool, and Southampton. So Great Britain can feel she is passing on something to a city that in many ways belongs to the past—but which now boasts 20 per cent. literacy in its 200,000 inhabitants.

Getting afghanis, a currency not easily obtained—unobtainable in most countries—to pay for the bus we must take at the frontier, to Herat, was a difficulty. The bank had none,

but our visit there was not wasted, for we met a young Australian, who had just come from Afghanistan; and in a friendly way he gave us much useful information. On his suggestion we decided definitely to go to Kandahar, and do the weary journey there, from Herat, by plane.

Eventually our afghanis were obtained by negotiations with the money-changers, at the entrance to the Mosque Approach, Mahomet Teherani acting for us. Thereafter we went three miles out of the city to Khassadi, a 'pleasure park,' with a lake and rather crude refreshment café; but it let us see how whole families 'camped out' by the roadside, cooking there, washing clothes in rather dirty streams—much as the gipsy does. Housing is certainly a world problem.

Truly conscientious workmanship—or craftsmanship, I would rather say, the like of which is only too rare, or, indeed, almost non-existent at times now in our own country—was demonstrated to me when I took my mountain boots to a cobbler's shop in Mashad. I had almost wrecked them on Demavend—almost every seam of a first-class, fairly new pair of boots had split during the dreadful going.

I watched the work, for which the man at once laid aside another job—the loving care with which he did every stitch by hand, then strengthened it all by machine. Two or three other men each took a hand in cleaning, re-staining, and polishing for fifteen minutes, in about three different ways with brushes, pads, and cloths—each boot, as it was stitched—until I virtually had a new pair of boots! During all this I was enthroned on a daïs, in an armchair, watching every operation; and another man brought me a pitcher of water and a glass, for the heat outside was intense. Again I did not risk drinking, though I just as gratefully poured out some water; and—for everything—they asked the equivalent of less than two shillings. There was no haggling about that! And when I shook hands with them and warmly thanked them they seemed to feel they were more than paid, and their good wishes followed me! They had pointed proudly to sundry British boot-polishes! It was pleasant to be leaving Iran (in the early hours of the next morning) with this last transaction in mind, rather than those with the more sophisticated of Tabriz and Teheran.



We had grave doubts about the keeping of a promise to wake us at the hotel at 3 A.M.! They were justified! It was fortunate that I simply stayed awake (Joyce is able to sleep, and usually to wake up, at any time). We had taken tickets for a bus—but we had to catch it a good distance away. *We* roused the hotel boy (to get us a taxi—very cheap in Mashad—to the bus station), a reversal of the original arrangement!

# 5

## *Buses*

**A**N Afghan bus is an exotic and unusual creation of man. The outside, gaily painted with colourful scenes of rural life, floral decorations, and erupting volcanoes, commands the custom of the most hard-bitten traveller. Fundamentally it is a truck with high sides and a flat roof, along the edge of which a twelve-inch board has been nailed to retain the luggage—in fact, a good-sized cattle-truck. Boards ten inches wide have been fixed as benches right across the bus from side to side, leaving no gangway. There are entrances at front and back, but most of the passengers have to climb over several benches (and consequently over the seated passengers) to reach their places. These boards have been fixed at a distance apart an inch or two less than the average measurement from thigh to knee, so that the unfortunate traveller has to sit either bow-legged or knock-kneed, since the proximity of his neighbour prevents turning to one side or the other. Nor can he tuck his lower limbs under his seat, for the hard wooden back to the bench, reminiscent of church pews, stretches uncompromisingly from shoulder to floor.

There is no regular service, and no timetable is issued. The few buses that do run, therefore, are always overcrowded, and it is necessary to arrive in good time, not only to secure a seat, but to make sure that the luggage also finds a place on the bus. Tickets at roughly a penny a mile are generally sold in the bazaars, but these are always sold out long before the bus starts. The fact that some of these buses are labelled “Afghan Mail” would imply that they were publicly owned, but no one wears an official uniform or badge and we saw no sign of mailbags.

When this vehicle, strongly reminiscent of a fairground, does draw out of its yard to start its journey, short or long, its recognized seating capacity is strained to bursting-point with twice that number. The unfortunate driver often finds himself

wedged between three passengers on his right and a fourth who has stowed himself on his left between the door and the steering-wheel. Those who have not succeeded in gaining a seat sit on the luggage in the rear or on the roof, which is already top-heavy with luggage, while half a dozen more sway precariously on the running-board. The only advantage bestowed on an 'upper class' passenger is that of occupying a place on one of the first two rows, but here the pressure is just as great.

Buses in Teheran are good, resembling the familiar red London Transport buses, but elsewhere in Iran they are generally very ancient and uncomfortable. Our first experience of long-distance bus-riding in either country was at Mashad, where we boarded a bus bound for Herat, over two hundred miles away across the Afghan frontier. Having no experience at this stage of the unpunctuality of the East, we were at the bus station half an hour before the announced departure time of 4.30 A.M. The gate was shut, and there was no light within, but a policeman, seeing two unescorted, unveiled, European women standing on the pavement before daylight, knocked up the janitor and insisted that we had seats inside. Gradually the passengers arrived, and they settled down in the gutter, thick with dust, to smoke the long hubble-bubble, passing it from one to another, each man taking a few puffs. These pipes are, in essence, clay vases with bulbous bases, out of which comes a slender vertical reed about two feet long, ending in a bowl into which the tobacco is put. Another reed, set at an angle of 45 degrees to the first, provides the mouthpiece. The vase is filled with water, and, by being pulled through the water, the smoke is said to be 'purified,' though the water is rarely clean.

At length a red bus drew out of the yard, and luggage was collected and thrown on top, all being firmly secured by a cord and the weight of three passengers. There was at once a mad rush for seats, but the driver held back the other passengers till he had installed us in two back seats, also insisting that the adjoining two should be kept vacant. These were later occupied by two German youths, who, in a brief interchange of words, told us that they were students touring the world "on a shoe-string," and were now, like us, heading for Kabul.



Heads formed a sea of turbans rising from white, knee-length shirts, and, as the bus lurched forward, husky voices, rising from this mass of humanity, intoned responses in strongly marked rhythm to the chants of a leader. We came to the conclusion that it was an invocation for a safe journey, and, as the road by this time had considerably deteriorated, we felt that such a prayer was not uncalled for! The springs in our seats, if there had ever been any, were broken, with the result that every time the wheels sank into a deep hole and emerged, we were shot up to the ceiling and down again on to a solid surface, to the detriment of head, legs, and body.

When a faint light appeared in the eastern sky the bus drew up alongside a stream. The Muslims got out, opened little bundles which they had been nursing all this time, and spread a mat on the ground. After washing in the sandy water they knelt in prayer, facing the rising sun. From time to time they prostrated themselves, their foreheads touching the ground, then resumed their kneeling position to continue their prayers to Allah. When all had finished the bus refilled and we continued on our way without further interruption till the village of Trodjam was reached. Here we swallowed a welcome cup of tea at a clean little café, stretched our cramped legs, and straightened our aching backs.

The relief afforded by this stop only served to emphasize the discomfort when we set off again. We could now see the bad state of repair of the road, and were ready to brace ourselves when, in the absence of a bridge, the bus bumped down into a dry stream-bed and rattled out up the opposite bank. The countryside itself was flat and monotonous, so that it seemed an eternity before we pulled up at midday at the frontier post of Yusef Abad. With the sun high in the heavens we drove into a courtyard of the Customs house and walked over the burning flagstones to an office where passports were examined. In the meantime all the luggage had been put under cover, and we were told that it would be transferred to an Afghan bus at 3.30 P.M. An 'hotel' was pointed out to us, and after walking the length of a deserted street we were glad to turn out of the sun-glare into its proffered shade. A polite, fussy little man showed us into a ground-floor bedroom with a stone floor, containing as

sole furniture two iron bedsteads and a small square table covered with a white cloth on which large black flies took off and alighted by the hundred. We flung open the doors and windows to create a draught, but, there being no means of fastening the casement, it banged incessantly as we vainly sought sleep. The manager returned and propped open the window with the table, but although this solved the noise problem, it did not take away the menace of the flies. Sleep was impossible, so we whiled away the time, drinking cup after cup of tea till we had once more to face the heat outside.

We walked slowly down the street, keeping in the two feet of shade provided by buildings, and reached the bus-station yard. Here all was quiet, and remained so till 4 P.M., when the Afghan mail bus drew out of its shed and the waiting passengers hurled themselves in. We managed to secure two adjacent seats in the rear and sat watching the turmoil. Our six pieces of luggage had somehow found a place in the back of the bus, but soon first one and then another was ejected to make room for large sacks and cases. The bags eventually found their way in again, but we gave up trying to keep a check on them, and concentrated on restricting our two-man seat to three people. At length the driver squeezed himself into his allotted eighteen inches on the front seat, let in the clutch, and set the overloaded, groaning contraption in motion.

A few miles out of the village we pulled up at a check-post where health certificates were demanded and we were warned that there was a cholera outbreak in Pakistan. A mobile quarantine van was ready for action in case anyone was unable to produce the requisite documents. However, everything was in order, and we moved forward again through cultivated land irrigated by little streamlets, till at dusk we came to a group of pink buildings set well back from the road. We drove into the spacious courtyard of one of these, and, at a sign from the driver, dismounted. We four Europeans, the two Germans and ourselves, were shown into a vestibule of the house, where our passports were taken from us for examination and we had the opportunity of learning more of the plans of our companions. All the other passengers squatted in the yard in little groups and produced various items of food from their bundles.

In the warmth of the house I suddenly felt a desire for fruit, and went outside to get the apples we were carrying in one of our kitbags. Then I found that all the luggage had been taken out of the bus and flung in a heap on the ground. I quickly spotted the rucksacks, ice-axes, and grips, but could see only one kitbag. A kindly Iranian turned over the bundles for me, and I confirmed, to my horror, that one of our kitbags was missing: I immediately called the attention of the driver to its disappearance, but he disclaimed all responsibility, saying that only one kitbag had been put on to the bus, and that, in any case, we should see after our own things. The loss was quite serious to us, and I asked if I could telephone back to Yusef Abad to see if, indeed, it had been left behind. I was conducted to another building, only to find that the single line had broken down. An aristocratic young man, wearing a grey Persian karakul cap, now joined the animated group which had gathered around us, and acted as interpreter. At first the driver blustered his way along, but when we said that we should report the loss to the authorities in Kabul, and mentioned that we were staying at the British Embassy there, he became alarmed, made a complete *volte-face*, and begged us not to complain, for he might thereby lose his job. To go back seemed the most sensible thing to do, for, once we reached our destination, Herat, *we* should be in one country and our luggage in another, with little hope of contact between the two. This bus service operated only once a week, so that at best we could not recover the lost kitbag for seven days, time we could ill afford to waste in Herat.

We then went to the police to get a ruling on the matter, and the driver and interpreter went with us to a solid pink building on the other side of the road. As we drew near we saw a figure sitting in state on the veranda supported by three uniformed men. On our approach he ordered extra chairs to be set on the beautiful Persian carpet which covered the whole floor. This important figure was the police superintendent of the frontier, and, having heard first our story and then that of the driver, he pronounced solemnly that if we went back it was extremely unlikely that the bag would be found. I insisted that the contents were extremely valuable to us, and that we must at least



try to recover them, so the necessary permission was at last given and we returned to the yard. Eleanor and I got into the empty bus; the driver took his seat, and we set off on the return journey of some fifteen miles.

Darkness closed in on either side as we drove west into a wonderful sunset; the haze of the distance was diffused into a phosphorescent pale green and mauve, while the strip of sandy track just ahead was lit up in the headlights in an angry orange glow. At one point the eyes of an animal—fox or jackal—shone for a brief moment. After a considerable time the bus pulled up with a jerk, the door was wrenched open, and the uniformed quarantine officer held an animated conversation with the driver. A third joined the group and addressed himself to us in halting English. "You lost your piece? We have it!" Apparently the bag had been found lying on the roadside when the bus had gone on again after examination of medical certificates. Either some one had taken it out to effect an entry and forgotten to put it back, or it had rolled out from its precarious perch down on to the roadway. How relieved we were to see the dear old roly-poly again!

The bus was turned and driven back with all speed through the now intense blackness. We imagined all the passengers we had left behind would be fretting and fuming to get away, but not at all! No one was ready, and at least another hour passed before anyone made a move. We installed ourselves in two adjacent seats in the rear of the bus, and took care this time to see that all our luggage was put on the bus top and securely tied down. Gradually the bus filled, and when all were settled in we set off for the final lap to Herat.

A cloud of white turbans in front prevented us from seeing the driver, and the pile of luggage behind was lost to sight under the recumbent forms of four bodies wrapped in colourful blankets. A pale round moon, escaping at intervals from light, drifting clouds, showed up the surrounding desert, which resembled rippled sand from which the tide had receded, leaving it marked in repeated waves. In many places the ground was covered with a low scrub about two feet high, each plant isolated and separated from the next by about three feet. There was a complete absence of habitation, but when the bus stopped

from time to time, a ghostly figure would rise from the dust by the side of the track and force its way in.

About midnight we pulled up level with a semicircle of about fifty camels reclining around a dark pile. From this black mass a figure disengaged itself, rolled up blankets, and came towards us. Two slighter figures arose and followed the first, revealing themselves as women completely swathed in cotton 'veils,' covering head as well as body. Holding the material across their faces, they mounted the steps of the bus and slipped into the seat vacated by a man in front of me. Then a stiff parcel, eighteen inches long, was handed to me by a cloaked figure who remained outside, and I passed it on to the woman in front. She uncovered the top three inches and revealed a baby's face, flat and wrinkled, with highly coloured cheekbones surrounded by a mass of jet-black hair. The eyes and mouth were closed, and the body was so tightly swathed that the parcel resembled a miniature mummy. As the journey proceeded an occasional whimper announced that it was, after all, alive.

It was still dark as we reached the outskirts of Herat and ran along narrow, deserted tree-lined streets. Sandstone houses increased in number as we reached the heart of the city, and began to thin out again before we turned aside to drive through iron gates into a big square piled with bales of wool. Eleanor and I made a move to get down from the bus, but were told to take our seats again as we were to be taken on to the hotel. When only the two Germans and ourselves remained the bus moved on again, and after another half-hour deposited us and our belongings at the gates of an imposing mansion surrounded by a park-like garden. The Germans helped us to carry the bags to the house, and, at our incessant tugging at the bell-pull, two sleepy-eyed boys conducted us to a large bedroom, apologized for the absence of electric light, and withdrew. With the aid of torches we located the bathroom next door, and, after a sketchy toilet in cold water, thankfully stretched out our limbs and immediately fell asleep.

The next morning we were able to examine our new quarters so providentially provided at 4 A.M. We found we were in a spacious hotel, and the manager, anxious to air his English, told us that this Hoteli Park had been built twenty years before

to cater for tourists. It was some miles out of the city on a site planned for further development, but so far nothing else had been built. We, however, found the peaceful setting and cool green garden delightful, and gladly spent a whole morning within the bounds of the garden. In the afternoon we drove in a tonga (a horse-drawn buggy) through avenues lined with trees to the centre of the city, and found it a monument of bygone splendour. In the tenth century Herat had been the first city of Afghanistan and the junction of trade routes through Afghanistan from the north and west to all parts of Asia. It had been overrun and destroyed, in part by the armies of Persia, Russia, and India, yet always it rose from the ashes. In the fifteenth century it was a renowned centre of art and culture. A new white building stood out against the sandstone of the old square fort, and the blue dome of an old mosque towered above the little roofs of many humble dwellings. The glory had departed, but the feeling of a bygone splendour still remained.

After much consideration of pros and cons for the last stage of our journey we decided to deviate a little from the direct road to Kabul so as to take in Kandahar. In order not to use more days we decided to book an air passage on the new Ariana Afghan Airlines, but, as this exhausted our stock of ready cash, we had to pay a visit to the bank to cash more Travellers' Cheques. The bank manager interviewed us in the larger of the two rooms. He examined our proffered cheques with great care, comparing them with specimens in a big stiff-backed tome. Mine, he agreed, were genuine, but he was very doubtful about Eleanor's. He had searched his book from cover to cover but could find no chairman's signature corresponding to that on her cheque. We pointed out that he probably had not got the most up-to-date signature, but nothing we could say would induce him to take the risk of cashing the cheque. Fortunately I could cash a sufficient number of cheques for the two of us, but a foreigner travelling alone would indeed have been in a quandary. As if to make up for seeming discourtesy, he offered us water from an earthenware pitcher at his side, ice-cold in spite of a room temperature of over 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

That evening the peace of the hotel gardens was disturbed by the arrival of a Volkswagen Utility van. This was the travelling



home of four young men from Berlin who, like us, were planning to climb in the Hindu Kush. We naturally were very much interested in each other's plans, and we learnt that they were bent on visiting Nuristan to climb peaks above the Anjuman Pass. They had not, however, obtained permission before leaving Germany, and realized that they might have to change their minds in view of official difficulties in Kabul. We were thankful to know that our plans had been approved beforehand, though how much weight this would carry on arrival we could not be sure.

That night the taps still produced only cold water, so we asked if we could have hot water for a bath. A fire was immediately lit under a tin boiler at the head of the bath, and within an hour there was enough water for two good baths.

As our plane was due to leave at 10.30 A.M., we were up in good time, and, after packing, paid the bill of 328 afghanis (just over £3) for two people for two nights, a very reasonable sum considering the magnificence of the apartment and the fact that we had individual personal service and food specially cooked for us. A 'taxi' (horse-drawn buggy) was called, and we drove to the air station in the city. Eleanor, ever sensitive to suffering, noticed that the horse had a wound on its rump, so while I made arrangements for the luggage she produced that purple liquid known as methyl blue and applied it to the raw place. An interested spectator showed a sore on his ankle, which Eleanor dealt with in a similar fashion.

About ten passengers boarded the bus which was to take us to the airport, and we picked up others on the way. There was a highly Europeanized family, who were seen off at the airport by quite a crowd. The father wore the usual grey karakul forage cap of the well-to-do Afghan, while his wife wore a chaudri completely covering her face and form. Underneath we caught a glimpse of the most up-to-date tweed suit and high-heeled shoes!

While we were waiting for the plane a young Afghan proudly showed us a German battery wireless set with extending aerial, and another offered us slices of melon from one at least 24 inches in circumference.

Without ceremony a plane alighted on the field in due course,

and we got into a small 26-seater. The flight was smooth except when we rose over high barren mountains; on each side of the range was an expanse of yellow sand glittering in a blaze of heat. In the two-hour flight we saw only one large river flowing through a comparatively green valley, but no towns or even villages. Irrigation plans are afoot with the help of American money, and this will eventually result in cultivation of 200,000 acres which in 1960 were only a barren waste, and the provision of electric power for industrial development.

Before we reached Kandahar coffee and biscuits were brought in on the familiar plastic tray accompanied by powdered cream and sugar packed in the U.S.A. The States are helping the Afghans to establish this their first airline, both in construction and training of personnel. While taking our refreshment we flew down the vale of Kandahar, following the river till we reached the dense area of buildings marking out the city of Kandahar, the former capital of Afghanistan.

After a short wait in a reception-room furnished on modern American lines we were called out to the Airlines bus. As we stepped out of the hangar doors a wave of heat met us as from an oven, and we were thankful to ride in a covered vehicle through the scorched land. A young Afghan riding with us, dressed in American casual clothes, got into conversation with us and explained that he was learning English from Americans as part of his training with Ariana Afghan Airlines. He hoped to go to America in a couple of years' time to complete his training, for Ariana is associated with Pan-American. With a scarcely perceptible American accent he asked us if we were staying the night, and then instructed the driver to stop at an hotel, and came on to see that we had good accommodation.

We entered through solid wooden doors into the vestibule of a wonderfully cool building. A smart, intelligent young man speaking a few words of English conducted us along corridors 15 feet wide with windows on each side, to a room nearly 20 feet square, again amazing in its coolness although it had no air-conditioning. A fan whirled at speed from the ceiling, and the direct glare of the sun was excluded by thick walls and green curtains. We were asked there and then to order a meal, so, with the help of the young self-appointed guide, we chose

boiled chicken with rice and salad, to be followed by melon and grapes and (if possible) "Coca-Cola."

Left to ourselves, we washed in one of the galaxy of bathrooms at the end of the corridor and then relaxed on the beds. An hour went by, then two, with no sign of food. We ventured out to inquire, and were given the reassuring news that it would be ready at 9 P.M., but an apology that there was no Coca-Cola in the town. We managed to bring this down to 8 P.M., but there were still three hours to wait. At this point we were pleasantly surprised to find our Afghan friend at our door again, suggesting a walk through the town to the bus office as it was now cooler outside. We agreed to this, a little surprised that anyone from the East should suggest walking.

We found that the hotel was situated in the better, residential part of the town where each house was surrounded by its own grounds, but as we walked along the broad avenue, towards the centre, the houses had less and less space and little shops began to appear. By the time we got to the crossroads marking the hub of Kandahar people had finished work and the pavements were crowded with men in white loose shirts, baggy trousers, and colourful turbans. Some wore European clothes, including a waistcoat. We wondered if this was a legacy of the British 'occupation.' Women, as usual, were mostly behind the walls of their homes. I often wondered *when* they did their shopping, for they were rarely seen on the streets. A policeman in khaki uniform stood high up in a little box erected in the centre of the hub, and the brisk movements of his arms as the traffic swirled round him indicated Western training.

Beyond the crossroads the road deteriorated. On each side were little booths open to the street displaying goods of all description on shelves around the three other sides. The seller sat cross-legged on the floor in the midst of his goods and stretched out an arm now and again to take down an article for an intending purchaser. The best trade was done by the sellers of grain and spices, which were arranged in colourful heaps in the front of the shop and weighed on scales balanced from the middle finger. Tailors sat cross-legged on the floor at their sewing-machines and made up the material bought at the neighbouring booth on the spot. An occasional meat-shop



displayed joints and carcasses hanging in the open air, an easy prey for all the flies and insects and the heat. Vegetable- and fruit-sellers squatted on the pavement, their wares at their feet: it was the melon season, and these made a colourful splash of orange amid the green and purple of grapes and the brown of root vegetables, for green vegetables were at a premium in this arid, hot land. In the gutter men knelt in front of little charcoal fires, over which they cooked pasties and sweets, eagerly bought up in very small quantities by the passers-by. Nearly every tenth shop was a chaikhana,<sup>1</sup> and all were full of men sitting on the carpet spread over the floor, drinking tea from little bowls and smoking long hookahs.

At last we reached a shop where no wares were displayed, but a very clean, handsome man in a pale-blue robe and spotless white turban sat on a lovely multi-coloured Afghan carpet. This was the owner of a bus, and he informed our interpreter that we could have seats on the bus leaving the next evening at 5 P.M., for Kabul, at a price of 120 afghanis each (roughly one guinea). The distance is over three hundred miles, and the journey would take about twenty-four hours.

We accepted this gratefully, as we had been a little afraid that we should have to kick our heels in Kandahar for several days waiting for the departure of a bus. We then paid a deposit of 50 afghanis and returned to the hotel in a tonga. I liked this mode of transport, for, from one's high perch back to back with the driver, one was able to see the sights at a leisurely pace; and leaning back on the gay rug, shielded from the sun by a fringed canopy, I was able to imagine myself an Oriental potentate, high above the masses who swarmed the streets.

The young manager of the hotel greeted us on the doorstep and told us we could have dinner when we pleased. We had it at once, and it was most welcome! Although the corridors were delightfully cool, our room seemed airless, so that sleep was difficult. Eleanor had worrying dreams; twice I had to wake her when the incoherent words became a scream of dismay.

The next morning was memorable for a visit to the post-office to send a telegram and post letters. Accompanied by the hotel boy, I took a tonga to the other end of the town. We

<sup>1</sup> A place for drinking tea.

pulled up in a courtyard full of packages, presumably the entrance to a warehouse. Under instruction I took my place with others on a stone bench outside a room whose door and window had been removed. When my turn for attention came I was invited to write out my telegram on a scrap of paper and pay 10 afghanis. Stamps were in another department, so I was conducted to a room where a young man sat in a confined space among packages and bales of wool. I bought stamps and doubtfully handed him the letter, wondering whether it could possibly reach England through this primitive postal service. It did!

The afternoon was spent in siesta (we were falling into Eastern habits) followed by packing, and by 5 P.M. we were ready awaiting our friendly 'guide,' who had insisted on coming to see us off. As he had not arrived by 5.30, however, we ordered a taxi and set off for the bus station. Our bus was easily recognizable by the crowd around it, and the word "Busservice" printed boldly on its side in red letters. The driver deposited us and our luggage in its proximity. The latter was quickly hoisted on to the top of the bus, but as yet the doors were locked, and the arrival of the driver was awaited with impatience. After a time the handsome Afghan who had sold us our tickets arrived, still beautifully dressed, and, waving back the shouting mob, opened the doors. There was a surge forward and a mad scramble for places. We stood back, and watched the scene with amusement and some little dismay, till the proprietor forcibly ejected two people from the seat behind the driver and invited us to take their places. In London we should have met opposition to this favoured treatment, but here, on the contrary, we were helped in by the nearest passengers, given a rug to sit on, and as much space as was humanly possible. At this juncture the face of the Ariana employee appeared at the window; he was relieved to see us installed and apologized for his lateness, due to delay at the airport. Five minutes later we were off, cheered by a hundred onlookers.

Looking round to the back of the bus, we saw a packed mass of white forms crowned with turbans of various hues and at the very back two women completely covered in black veils. After a few minutes those nearest to us essayed a few words of English,

and we were surprised to find how many people did in fact speak simple English or 'American.' All were interested in the land we had come from and our plans in their country: all shook their heads pessimistically at the words 'Hindu Kush,' and all indicated that Kabul was indeed a wonderful modern city. As night fell the bus halted at a stream, and men descended to wash and pray. We stood a little apart with the two women, and watched the kneeling figures as one by one they rose in the fading light and mounted the steep step of the bus.

We were passing through desert country, and most of the streams were dry. Here and there were sandstone houses set in small fields of scant pasture, from which tracks led away into the solitude of the distant landscape. From time to time we met camel trains travelling on the old but now metalled trade route between Kandahar and Kabul. After this I slept lightly, held in position by Eleanor and the passengers on my left, so that by daylight I was ready to get out and stretch my legs, while the devout Muslims prayed again. Much later we stopped again at Ghazni, where we halted for a short time, but we had no opportunity of seeing the interesting 'remains' in this historic town.

From this point on there was much more cultivation, and the villages looked more prosperous. We were much higher, and the air was cooler, allowing crops the chance of survival. The number of streams increased, and a certain amount of artificial irrigation had been undertaken. As we climbed over higher passes we passed the encampments of kuchis (nomads) living in goat's-hair tents, with their flocks of goats, sheep, and camels grazing around them. In the valleys homesteads were surrounded by crops, but there was no mechanized farming. Bullocks tramped out the corn, and children winnowed the grain by throwing it up into the air. Women sat outside their houses grinding enough corn for their daily needs, between smooth stones, while others cooked over dung fires. As we had to stop frequently to replenish the overheated engine with water, there was opportunity for driver and passengers to chat with the local people, and they took every opportunity of doing so, regardless of time. The same driver drove all the way, and it is no wonder that he seized every excuse for a stop to stretch



his legs. Eleanor, who had had a sleepless night, dozed from time to time, and provided a constant terror to the soldier behind us, who was afraid she would fall out of the unsafe door whenever the bus gave an extra lurch.

When we had stopped in a village for food, a young Afghan student, who had joined the bus after us, took us down the village street away from the main crowd to a 'tea-shop,' where, sitting cross-legged on the carpet, we ate eggs fried in mutton fat, chupatties, and melon, and drank tea out of bowls with the villagers. We were given knives and forks, but the others, after washing their hands in water poured over them by an attendant, ate with their fingers.

Their favourite diet seemed to be rice, perhaps because this is easier to manipulate without implements than fried eggs(!), though some managed even these with their fingers.

From now on the surface of the road improved, and we made better time. It was late afternoon, however, before we crossed the Kabul river into Kabul itself, and alighted in the centre of the city, tired, stiff, and very dirty.

# 6

## *Kabul: Postponement, Protocol, and Parties*

WE had longed to see the near-legendary Kabul, and in a sense we were at the real beginning of our venture into the little-known Hindu Kush, the whole aim and object of our journeyings. Afghanistan's capital seems to be in a kind of basin, surrounded by not very attractive-looking, bare mountains, desolate and jagged. As one seems to descend somewhat, approaching the city, and there are a number of gaps in the broken chain of hills, one has a view downward of a fairly extensive city, stretching out from the congested centre to the flat lands immediately outside it. Our real entry was over excellent, metalled roads, the work of Afghanistan's near neighbour on the north, Russia.

At the yard, where our bus arrived, our luggage was eventually flung down from the roof of this 'fairground grandstand' (in which we had travelled for twenty-four hours), much sat upon and trampled upon by the excess travellers on top, and almost unrecognizable with its thick coating of dust. However, at least, it was all there. There were sundry tongas standing near but no sign, just there, of a real taxi, of which the city really has many, and we asked a rather dim-looking youth standing by his tonga if he knew the British Embassy. He nodded at once and piled our goods into his vehicle. It was soon pretty obvious that he had either never even understood our question or that he had no idea whatever how to reach our destination—or perhaps that he was deliberately taking us as far out of our way as possible, to charge us a still larger fare.

The Afghan university student on the bus, who had left us at the ancient town of Ghazni, had told us what we should pay, and so did another traveller at the bus station, who, we thought, had also made things clear to the driver. We did not intend to pay more for our unwished-for long ride, although we were getting some idea of the city. We stopped the driver several times, and addressed likely-looking pedestrians, or men in

halted cars, who replied sensibly in German or English, and directed our driver.

Admittedly the British Embassy, with its twenty-seven acres of grounds comprising the compound, could hardly be farther from the centre of Kabul; and it was with a sigh of relief that we at last saw a Union Jack fluttering, and a fine white building among beautiful trees. The driver took us to the imposing gates, guarded by a sentry, but no farther would he go; he turned his tonga off to the left, and as we descended he began to put out our luggage, which was collected by a soldier and carried through the gates. We thought we had checked everything, and proceeded to pay him as agreed. Whereupon he flew into a positive fury, and the position was again made plain to him by the soldier, to whom we had summed up the situation. We were glad to escape from the altercation, through the gates. Only when we had given another look at our collected luggage did we realize that a small tartan rucksack of Joyce's, kept out for the journey, must be, by accident or design, still in the now vanished tonga; we remembered that the driver had put it under the cloth flap of his front seat.

We never saw that driver nor the rucksack again. The latter contained several really good articles of civilized clothing, toilet things, and so forth. He had got the value of the higher fare he had wanted, *many* times over—to our intense chagrin. . . .

We were to have the hospitality of the Embassy, staying actually in the home of the First Secretary and his wife (Harry and Ruth Downing), a charming house to the left of the main Embassy building known to many as "Curzon's Dream." We were told that when Lord Curzon was Viceroy of India he had dreamed of having the Embassy in Kabul "the most beautiful in the East" (it certainly is beautiful, in its own right); it was to "impress" people; but to impress *whom* (East or West), it was added, is not clear!

It was designed by an Indian architect, but some Greek influence is suggested to a European on seeing it. It was not finished until some time after Lord Curzon's period of office; even then it was not completed as intended; there was to have been another gallery above that in which the grand staircase terminates. It impressed us (from the West) as being really



beautiful, inside and outside, and very beautifully kept—the whole compound, in fact, a lovely, green English world, shut away from some of the less pleasant things of the capital.

We were warmly welcomed by Ruth Downing and later by her husband. Introductions had been given in England through mutual acquaintances; it *could* have seemed rather ‘official,’ but we were ‘at home’ at once—like old friends, and could hardly have met with greater kindness. But other circumstances were to ensure that, having set ourselves to tackle a slightly tough expedition, we were not going to be allowed to sit back with smug satisfaction and “boast ourselves of tomorrow” because we were temporarily living in great comfort—not to say, luxury—at times.

We had scarcely got ourselves acquainted with our kind hostess, and immediately been offered the delights of baths and drinks, when she broke it to us that *none* of our equipment—nearly half a ton—had arrived, as (again through their kindness in allowing it to be sent there) it should have done, more than a week before. Worse still, no one knew *where* it was—except that it must be still in Pakistan. . . .

Happy as we were in our new-found civilization, this was a really terrible blow, for our immediate, natural reaction was—no equipment, no expedition. . . . However, worry without action never got anyone anywhere. An Embassy lorry was to come up from Peshawar very shortly, and might bring news; meantime we must possess our souls in patience. A friendly first evening was spent meeting with the Military Attaché and his wife, for drinks on the terrace, before dinner, and we were waited on by a most imposing Pakistani bearer: all such a very far cry from our last solid meal, eaten sitting on the ground—the fried eggs in deep mutton fat, which clung to one’s fingers—except that in both cases there was kind hospitality. Sleep that night in soft beds in attractive bedrooms seemed a foretaste of heaven—after sitting bolt-upright on the bench-like seats of the Kandahar bus during a freezing night, huddling together for warmth.

Next morning, with a Land Rover at our disposal, we first went to make the acquaintance of Mr Abdullah Tarzi. He received us with great courtesy; and, having been at Oxford

(Exeter), his English was polished, and he spoke with comparatively little accent. (I remembered with what interest I had once followed the fortunes of his late brother-in-law, then King Amanullah.) We were given much useful information and were asked to return to his office next day for newspaper reporters. We then went on to the police, who were to extend our visas. We returned to luxuriate by the swimming-pool in the Embassy grounds—Joyce to enjoy a dip, and I gossiping on the brink with sundry ‘Diplomatic wives.’ The grounds proved lovely; and each house had, in addition, a private garden, part of a beautifully designed whole. Tea in the garden and evening drinks on the terrace always seemed to waft one back to some English country house: the brown pall of dust, which almost invariably hung over Kabul, never *seemed* to hang over this “green and pleasant land.” Some part, or other, of it was deliberately ‘flooded’ every day, so that it never looked parched—and English flowers bloomed everywhere. Zinnias were two or three times the height of those in England. In addition to the native birds in this ‘sanctuary,’ the British one most in evidence was the magpie: as many as ten would hold a party on the lawns, in the brilliant sunlight, proving again that their ‘black’ is iridescent blue, and a little green.

Kabul is rapidly being modernized. Till towards the close of the last century the Amir lived in the Bala-Hissâr, or Acropolis, which still dominates the south-east of the city—in a rather ruined state now, rising 150 feet above the plain. The city was formerly walled, and only about three miles in circuit, with seven gates; two now remain. The very old and terribly congested parts of the city are gradually being pulled down, as the risk of fire, with so many wooden structures, is very great, and there have been, even recently, some disastrous conflagrations, with much loss of life. Wide streets and avenues and metalled roads are taking the place of narrow mud alleys, in which, less than a hundred years ago, no vehicle could go.

Some quite fine buildings are appearing on all sides. But there are still strange blends of modern amenities and barbarous squalor. To the Afghan in the wilds Kabul is thought of as a kind of Mecca; but his own counterpart in the capital is a less pleasant being.

In the cities, strangely enough, the veiled woman is still the rule rather than the exception; only the young girl is usually in modern dress. The Afghan chaudris are quite the most beautiful in colour and design to be seen in a Muslim country. Some, of course, are obviously old, and shabby. But they are in soft colourings, blues, greens, rust, wine, grey, for instance, usually of silk. Starting from the tight-fitting 'cap,' often finely embroidered in the self-colour, the 'visor' part in front has a tiny 'grille,' through which even the eyes are hardly visible. All in one, from 'top to toe,' the cloak-like part is shaped from a rounded yoke, and 'sun-ray' accordion-pleated from the neck down, and fairly full at the hem. (It is not anything like so full as the heavy white—usually not-so-white—cotton veils which are often seen in Pakistan, a pleated, straight piece of material from a circular yoke.) In Afghanistan it is the older generation who wish to retain the veil; young women—and their husbands—are afraid of the parents' reactions. King Amanullah and his Queen met with plenty of trouble when they tried to ban the veil. Less than six months before our expedition started little girls had been killed in Kandahar in riots over the question, we heard. The University and the hospitals are in the van of progress. The veil will go, as it has done with their women students. Turkey has proved the amazing progress of the woman *without* the veil! Afghanistan will probably do the same.

Obviously members of the Diplomatic Corps in any capital of the world have many duties to perform, routine and exceptional, in connexion with their appointed work. To the complete outsider not the least of these duties appear to be social ones. One gathering an evening, to three and four—receptions, parties, or public and private functions seemed to be the rule—in Kabul anyhow. This getting together of often the very same people of the different nationalities of the various missions, merely in different settings—to talk lightly, over elegant refreshment (even this, at times, of different national origin)—probably has great value in creating a really friendly spirit among individual nationals. This spirit in turn may find its way into international feelings, and actions and interactions, for it is always, in the event, those 'at the top' who create a feeling for one country by another. Members of a football club or a *corps*



*de ballet* have no particle of ill-will against their opposite numbers in a totally different country; but the Governments (or leaders of them) in those countries can very quickly work up what can be a wholly artificial feeling of animosity in those very individuals, for the other foreigner.

For those compelled to take part perpetually in these functions the life could—and probably often does—become very boring indeed, or, at the least, very tiring; and it must take an agile mind and some idealism to make it all worth while for them.

Again, to the outsider it is interesting and amusing for a comparatively short period. In our case this period was lengthened from about three days—which we had contemplated as being enough to repack our provisions and equipment and to collect available information about our route and transport and so on—to nearly ten days. These were apt to be, as days passed, rather anxious ones as well as socially enjoyable. At least, however, we had, on second thoughts, no idea of *abandoning* the venture into the Hindu Kush entirely; we must collect, by hook or by crook, just the bare minimum of equipment and food to take us, for at least a very short time, to the goal of such long planning.

His Excellency, on our very first meeting with him, probably most wisely, did not fill us with false hopes about any speedy arrival of our goods, but he was the one to 'set the ball rolling,' and to give us courage to persevere, by lending us two excellent down sleeping-bags; a first necessity! So we began seriously to think what we could *do without*, borrow, and buy.

It was more especially then that we began to feel how little connexion Great Britain seemed to have with this struggling country, composed as it was—whatever respective Governments and political leaders might feel for each other—of a friendly and likeable people. Commercially and economically Afghanistan seems to be controlled by Russia, Japan, and Germany: the political implications remain to be seen. Those three were the countries of origin of almost everything to be bought. In Teheran we had been able to get almost any British commodity we wanted; public transport is of British manufacture. In Kabul practically nothing in the way of con-

sumer goods, to our sorrow, was "made in England"; it was with an amused feeling of surprised elation that I spotted two beautiful, but very costly, knitted woolly coats "made in Shetland"! If, for instance, any British cloth finds its way into Afghanistan, no one seems to know it. Public transport is chiefly of German or Russian origin, and I found myself stooping down to look at tyres and spare parts (although I am not a motorist) after I had seen the former stamped "Yokohama."

An evening reception we did most thoroughly enjoy was one held for the newly arrived Indian Ambassador and his lady, in a charming garden gay with coloured lights, some distance away. With the many beautiful saris of the Indian ladies who collected and *sat* on a terrace, while all others moved about on foot, it was a colourful and animated scene not easily forgotten. It was memorable for me for two other reasons, highly amusing in retrospect only! A German diplomat, keen on mountaineering, gripped my damaged right hand (only partially in plaster) in such a friendly and congratulatory manner that I was in severe new pain with it for some time! The Indian Ambassador, more observant, had expressed great solicitude, and touched it most gently! Then, too, the hospitality was so great, and the Indian dainties pressed upon us so varied, interesting, and numerous, that I apparently partook "not wisely, but too well." Being completely unused to the tremendous heat and strength of the curries and seasonings, which at the time seemed so delicious—and this was followed later, elsewhere, by a wonderful meal at a second, Iranian, party (where the Iranian Counsellor showed us beautiful slides in colour, of places, people, and things in Afghanistan)—I spent all next day lying on my bed, while Sadiq, the bearer, waited on me. I had to miss an Indonesian party to celebrate the Anniversary of their Independence, which Joyce was able to attend. (I fear I had continued to accept charmingly persuasive Indian pleas to "try" something else while she had described our climbing plans to interested individuals!) This was my one really bad day in Kabul, whereas Joyce said later that she had never felt very well all the time she was there because of the heat.

We had our interviews with the two chief newspapers of

Afghanistan—*Isla* and *Anis*; their representatives, rather amusingly for us and embarrassingly for them, arrived *together*! They are rival publications! Mr Tarzi and a second man were there to act as interpreters when necessary. The man for *Isla* spoke English, but the reporter from *Anis* did not do so. She was the most unusually lovely girl, an outstanding example of twentieth-century youth at its very best and most brilliant in Afghanistan. It was difficult to take one's eyes off a face so beautiful, distinguished, and distinctive, but which registered intelligence and interest with every flicker of expression. As a pianist myself, always interested in *hands*, my glance kept straying to a pair of, I think, the most sensitive-looking and so-called 'artistic' and exquisitely delicate I have seen in a woman in any country. The skin was as pale as her complexion—a creamy tint—and the length of the slim fingers almost abnormal, the nails being naturally a long oval, not just *grown* long(!), and polished a delicate pink shade. She moved them not self-consciously, nor with the animation of the Latin races, but just expressively on occasion, to emphasize a point. Her dark-brown eyes suggested brains and feeling, and were just very faintly almond-shaped. She wore her soft and shining—but not 'sleek'—black hair done 'high,' in the Paris fashion of the moment, and she was very simply dressed in European outdoor clothes, in the best possible taste. She worked in a bank, and did announcing for the Afghan Radio, and reporting for *Anis* in her free time. She is a ready-made 'film type' if ever there was one. Why is it that only the Japanese seem to think Afghanistan—with some of the most truly thrilling scenery (and wonderful-looking people) in the world—a place in which to make films, without building 'sets'?

Great preparations were afoot in Kabul while we were there, for Jeshyn, which is the celebration of Afghan Independence. A fine and extensive piece of ground, set aside for the express purpose, was the site of many fine pavilions to show different countries' wares and achievements. We heard at a much later date, when we had returned after many weeks to Kabul, that the American one was deservedly the most popular and most visited. The United States bring to Afghanistan their habitual wealth and progressive ideas. They are taking a hand in great



irrigation schemes, training airways pilots; and the young Kabul University is having considerable assistance from American universities, to build it up on modern lines.

We were privileged in the comparatively short time we were there, during two stays in Kabul, to see things from both sides, so to speak—Afghan and, later, American. We were able to visit the University and to meet Dr Ashgar, its President. The University was 'born' as such in 1946. There had previously been, he told us, a Medical School from 1932, when Law and the Arts had been under the Ministry of Education. We were shown the model of the extensive group of buildings planned to be built on the outskirts of the city. (We later saw the huge site already being prepared.) Dr Ashgar has high hopes and great enthusiasm, and anticipates having in ten years' time 10,000 students instead of the present 1500. Some of the women, he told us, show more brilliance than the men, which seems strange, when one thinks of their place in the scheme of things for centuries (and that many are still veiled). Dr Ashgar maintains that this situation causes the men to work much harder! Curiously enough, it is women who want particularly to go in for Science. He thinks they have the idea (not altogether a wrong one) that it will ultimately benefit their homes—which are in some need of improvement by any standards.

On another day we were able to go over the Medical School. The Dean was absent, but the Director and a professor showed us all they could. It was good to see the keen efforts being made, and rather humbling to realize how *very* little they possess compared with ourselves. There were two laboratories and rooms (labelled in French) for the study of Pathology, Physiology, Social Medicine (particularly for research into malaria). There were just one or two pieces of electrical equipment, which they displayed with pride and almost awe; our smallest hospital would have far more. And this is for the *thirteen million* inhabitants of Afghanistan—for no other centre has anything like what Kabul can boast. There are 49 hospitals in the whole country—and just 320 doctors. One would need a stout heart not to despair, before beginning.

We watched keen young students of both sexes, intent on what they were hearing in the lecture-room. Only the

Department for Anatomy they thought we might prefer not to visit just then, with its dissecting room!

Time precluded our seeing the hospital really attached to the Medical School; nor could we visit the Science Faculty—but we had a good idea of a fight against ignorance and poverty, bravely undertaken. We had spoken with a French woman professor returning soon to her native country, an American, and a German—all contributing their part. We happened to ask the last-named why he had come here, and he replied, “Because it is interesting.” Working against odds, with barely enough of the barest necessities for the task, is certainly a challenge.

The driver of our Land Rover from the British Embassy—one of the few British-made vehicles to be seen on the streets of Kabul or, indeed, anywhere—had in error at first taken us to what proved to be the Medical Depot, to which sundry supplies were brought, although there was little to be seen in the way of stores. But the official there, to our surprise, hailed us with enthusiasm; he had recognized us, he said, from our “pictures in the papers,” and was proud to shake hands and wish us well!

Weeks after this we were to learn more, from Americans themselves involved, of help given by the United States to further education in Afghanistan—a backward country, anxious to learn, given the tools—capable of doing the work.

On the same day that we had seen something of Higher Education we went to see the progress of an Afghan Government-aided scheme which was designed to help women with no University aspirations—indeed, chiefly for those already married, with homes and children to be looked after, but who wished, as used to be said in Victorian England, ‘to better themselves’ intellectually (where such, by this spirit, contributed to its greatness). In these buildings in Kabul the more ignorant could really ‘go to school’ for the basic subjects; and, as it was really a “Women’s Institute,” these Afghan women could also develop their skills in needlework particularly (cutting out, machining, embroidery, and so on), housecraft, child-care.

The woman President who took us round was pleased to tell us all she could, and we spent some time in a nursery classroom

where thirty-six healthy-looking small children (very different from the undernourished little sufferers we later saw on our treks into the wilds) were enjoying themselves singing, or perhaps "making a joyful noise" would be a more accurate description(!), to the accompaniment of a piano-accordion, played by a young man who seemed to be enjoying himself, and kept their attention. Meantime the mothers could study!

The riddle of the Afghan nation was again forcibly brought home to one; for one could have sworn that at least half a dozen of these children were European, not to say British—little boys and little girls, with fair skins, fair hair, blue eyes—there seemed nothing of central Asia about them except their language. All of them, we were assured, had Afghan parents. Certainly the armies of Alexander the Great must, as is always maintained, have passed this way—and *more* than once, one would think! (This admixture of blood goes back *much* farther than the days of British India!) For this land-locked country is ringed by peoples who have to some extent probably imparted their various features and characteristics by intermingling—the Mongolian, the Arab, the Pathan—but there are no Europeans on their borders (except that to the north of them now is the U.S.S.R., which blends a smaller part of Europe with a larger part of Asia. Many Soviet citizens, even in Moscow, look less 'European' than many an Afghan).

Another theory to account for the mixed race, put forward in an old-fashioned but most interesting book (by an early missionary to the North-west Frontier) which I found in the Embassy library, is that Solomon (in his avid search for rich treasures of the Far East) had his caravans travel this route. It is certainly true that some tribesmen we met, far from the civilization of the town, had markedly Jewish features. Truly an interesting people anthropologically.

The final part of our 'tour' of these buildings, where they run a theatre and cinema for outsiders, to help pay the cost of maintaining the scheme, was to see an exhibition of the women's handwork, shortly to be transferred to the Jeshyn ground, for the general public to view. Some of this was very fine indeed, and original in conception and design.

That particular day, August 20, was memorable, after all our



'social studies' in the city, for another reason. Three days previously an Embassy lorry had returned from Peshawar, with the dispiriting news that there was no sign or word of our baggage after its dispatch (by *goods*-train unfortunately, so that it could be sitting in any sidings) from Karachi, to which we had previously sent urgent telegrams. As there are no railways in Afghanistan, the final stage of its journey would have to be by road from Peshawar, over the Khyber Pass. On the 20th we were attending a garden luncheon-party at the home of the Military Attaché and his wife, and our worries were at least temporarily forgotten, in animated conversation—with French and Italian diplomats chiefly on this occasion—and good food and drink, when suddenly a bearer appeared with a note (from whom and from where was not stated) saying our baggage would be arriving next day! It was assuredly with light hearts and many congratulations and good wishes that we finished our meal. The baggage was a fortnight behind schedule, but, as things had turned out, *we* had been nearly a week late in arriving in Kabul, with all the happenings in Iran.

It had been a gay and delightful break to be at the Embassy, to see something of the life of at least one section of the British who do not reside in Great Britain—but who take much of their surroundings and almost all their characteristics with them, to odd corners of the earth. Other nationalities do the same, in particular the Americans. Then, too, the extra time had given us more chance to see Kabul, ancient and modern, to study the people at first hand.

The night before our good news arrived we had gone to a party at another house in the compound for a cinema show in the garden. Oddly enough, not only had the British film shown been made at studios near my former Buckinghamshire home, but it used the local scenery and little shopping centres, of which I knew almost every inch! So a special bit of England had been by pure coincidence brought to a stranger in a strange land! Yet, more important still, during an interval for drinks we had a perfect view of the very latest United States satellite, the twenty-foot-high, six-ton affair, of which we had heard so much. I was particularly interested to compare the appearance with that of the second Russian sputnik, containing

poor Laika, the dog! I had been lucky in getting a first-rate view of this in England: it had seemed to me to be considerably lower than this American one appeared to be, in the heavens. The 'graceful' movement again struck me.

It seemed as if to round off the lucky day with its welcome news, following this, that a dance had been arranged as a farewell send-off for an Embassy colleague and his wife (at whose house we had also been entertained on more than one occasion); and this was to be on the lawn below the Downings' terrace—where the buffet supper was to be at little tables. There had been great preparations, large platforms (on carpets) for the dancing had been arranged, and great thought was given to the surfacing and polish of these; for the music to be relayed, loud-speakers were placed on the balcony. Coloured lights were festooned in the fine old trees, other lawns had been 'flooded' to be green; the old English flowers seemed charmingly illuminated by the fairy lamps, as was the vinery with its huge bunches of grapes, under a weathered brick pergola.

The evening passed off most happily; there were contacts with a number of nationalities, though, as often the case, no Afghans: they seem afraid to mix. I particularly enjoyed conversation with the Embassy's Indian interpreter, who—in perfect English and a well-modulated voice—gave me inside information about the Afghan way of life which he had come to know at first hand over many years. All he said was borne out by what we ourselves learned and saw later, on our Afghan wanderings, now just shortly to begin—entirely away from the influence of town or city. He had a wide sympathy, and breadth of understanding not limited by nationality.

By one of those fortunate chances which are perhaps not chances at all I found myself for supper at a table with the American Air Attaché and his wife and the German diplomat (also a mountaineer) who had crushed my fractured fingers at the Indian reception! The first-named was most interesting in a 'chatty' way about the satellite—for I am no scientist. He knew it, on the ground. We saw it again *twice* during the many hours of the dance. Odd to think it had done a world tour in the time. . . . But the German had just returned from a part of the Hindu Kush which we had hardly dared to hope

we could reach. He had been camping and climbing with three Britons from our Embassy, and they had managed to get to the Anjuman Pass and over it, with a few Afghans whom they had eventually persuaded to accompany them. He mentioned where *not* to pitch tents in the Hindu Kush, and points about the characteristics of the tribesmen and various other things of particular interest, such as costs, all of which I tried to pigeon-hole for further use. He little knew how his name was to be bandied about by me when certain Afghans were arguing, weeks later, that *no one* had been able to go to that Pass—and then one askār gave the lie to their words by showing with great pride a testimonial from this very man and the three Britons!

Getting my hand out of plaster and having another X-ray were things which occupied considerable time at the last. Sorting our stores and equipment, medical supplies, and apparatus into sizeable loads was a big business too; and the next two days were given over to these real preparations for our now imminent departure. In the case of my damaged hand there was an Irish doctor on the spot, for the Embassy had its own hospital in the compound, capable of taking eight in-patients! For a new X-ray, however, I had to go some distance and wait a long time at a not large Afghan 'hospital'; it was chiefly an X-ray department of larger buildings elsewhere. It was interesting to watch the patients, mostly veiled women, coming and going. I admired the efficiency of the Afghan radiologist, who was most courteous and friendly.

We had to collect a great many afghanis (in notes) for paying the men we would need later as porters. Fuel oil of some kind had to be procured. It had to be Russian kerosene, the only thing we could get. A small bus, a Mercedes-Benz (a name much in evidence on the roads in Kabul), was to take us and our goods on the northern road out of the city.

We had seen Afghan troops drilling and marching in preparation for Jeshyn. Our departure was to coincide with its commencement, on August 23.



*The Panjshir to Zenēh*

IT was a strange breakfast-party that gathered round the Downings' table at 5.30 A.M. on Tuesday, August 23. Eleanor and I were clad for the simple life of the mountains, except that, in view of the intense heat we were likely to meet for the first stage of our journey up the Panjshir Valley, we had substituted cotton skirts for the usual tweed trousers. The Downings, on the other hand, were in gala clothes: Ruth in a bright, printed garden-party frock and rose-petal hat, and Harry in 'tails' and white tie. It was not that they had just arrived back from an evening party, but that they were dressed for the Jeshyn Parade. On this the first day of the Afghanistan Independence celebrations, custom demanded that members of the Diplomatic Corps, wearing their most formal dress, should be in their places on the raised platform of the Parade Ground by 6.30 A.M.

Conversation was confined to conventional remarks, for emotion ran high. Ruth and Harry had only two more weeks to prepare for their annual leave, so that when we returned from the wilds they would be in England, and it was doubtful if life would throw us together again. I suppose they had some qualms for our safety, too, though they would not give expression to them in front of us. Although very excited, I was almost sorry that this D-day had at last come, for it marked the end of a long period of preparation and anticipation; expectation built up over the long months might fall flat in realization. We were about to put to the test what we had planned, and, right or wrong, we should have to go through with it now. Eleanor had no qualms.

A grating of wheels on the gravel outside at 6 A.M. warned us of the prompt arrival of our bus: at the same time the Downings' car drove up to the door. We bade farewell to our hosts, expressing, however inadequately, our gratitude for their kindness during our stay in Kabul. How very much more difficult

it would have been if we had not been able to operate from the shelter and strength of the British Embassy in this country so unprepared for tourists!

I hurried out to check the packages being hoisted into the bus—seventeen in all. There were eight sacks containing food, one kitbag of scientific instruments, one of kitchen equipment, one strong black metal medicine and first-aid box, one sack containing two tents, three kitbags of personal effects, and two rucksacks. In addition, we put in eight gallons of paraffin contained in one jerry-can and three bright-red tins.

Gul Mohammed, the Afghan in charge, seemed to have everything well in hand, and was being ably assisted by the driver and a coolie, so I went up to my room to collect last-minute items, and reappeared strung around with two cameras, camera-bag containing all the paraphernalia of photography, and a vacuum flask suspended by a leather strap round one shoulder. I took a front seat and chatted with Gul, who told me that he would come as interpreter and organizer as far as the village of Zenēh, after which there was no good road, so he would return. He would, however, arrange for us to be taken care of by the local dignitaries. We eventually got off by 7 A.M., and as we drove along the good "Tarmac" road going north we met many people coming in from the country, mostly on foot but some riding horses, donkeys, or camels, and all bound for the Kabul festivities. An occasional bus-load of villagers, men hanging on to the running-boards like flies, rumbled past us, and, of course, there were the inevitable bicycles of the city-dwellers. Farther out we passed the deserted encampments of the kuchis, for they too were on their way to take part in the fun of this universal holiday.

The first town of any size through which we passed was Charikar, a prosperous little community 38 miles from Kabul. We were told that its name had now been changed to Parwan, and that it was known far and wide for its knives, scissors, and daggers: every Afghan loves a sharp weapon! The streets were gaily decorated with bunting and the national flag of black, red, and green vertical stripes overlaid with a white device of a mosque surrounded by a broken circle. The bazaars were thronged with men in holiday mood, moving slowly along from

one stall to another, stopping every now and again to squat in one of the many chaikhanas, where a charcoal fire kept the water ever bubbling. A large notice marked "High School" indicated the way to the very new stone building a short distance down a side-street, showing that education, at any rate around the capital, was now an established fact.

Leaving these signs of civilization behind, the road entered a wide valley where wheat and Indian corn stood high in the fields, and vines were in full leaf on the surrounding hillsides. The road surface was no longer smooth, but in a reasonable condition for wheeled traffic. We therefore made good speed till we crossed the wide Salang river at Gulbehar, an old town with a sprawl of red-brick houses on the outskirts, for the Germans had built a textile factory here in 1953, and subsequently accommodation for the workers who came in from the surrounding countryside. From now on we were in the valley of the Panjshir, and were to follow this beautiful river for the rest of this ride, and later on foot to its source. At this point it was a good hundred feet wide, flowing translucent, smooth, and deep, except where huge boulders diverted its waters, transforming the turquoise channel into a spray of white foam. The sun, now high in the heavens, brought out the colours of the stones by the water's edge and the vegetation of the banks in strong contrast to the dusty grey of the surrounding parched hills.

An hour later we were creeping along the ledge of a narrow defile with a drop of 200 feet below us, down to the restricted water churning in the gorge below. It eddied and swirled in deep pools, throwing up white spray over the impeding rocks, then falling back into the stream in a series of cascades and cataracts, to subside into emerald-green pools before continuing its mad race to join the Indus, 300 miles away.

At the end of the gorge the valley began to widen again at this higher level, until in another hour it was a mile across, a patchwork of cultivated strips. The track hugged the mountain-side at an easy gradient, so we were able to proceed at a steady pace, but round each bend lurked the danger of travelling flocks of goats and sheep, sometimes hundreds at a time. As a child I had often wondered in reading the Bible story of the



Last Day why the sheep had to be separated from the goats, for in England they are rarely together, but now I realized that in the East it is the usual thing to have mixed flocks. Sometimes we were forced to bring the car to a halt while the animals streamed past us, or swarthy shepherds drove them up the hillside till we had passed. We had seen fat-tailed sheep before, in Iran, but in these Afghan animals the fatty protuberance behind seemed to be a swollen part of the body rather than the tail which stored the fat. They presented a variegated patch of colour broken here and there by the black heads of the goats, some with unusually large horns.

On arrival at a village of some size we turned up a side track to visit the Hakim (Headman). It turned out that he was away at the Jeshyn celebrations, but after some delay his deputy was found. We were not surprised that he did not know of our impending arrival, but our companion Gul Mohammed was horrified at his ignorance. "Have you not seen in the newspapers, or heard on the radio," he said, "that two British women were travelling up the Panjshir to climb in the Hindu Kush?" Questioned afterwards, he said that there were wireless-sets in the village with which they should be able to get Kabul station, and in any case there were University students now home from Kabul who should have brought the news. Our journey onward was apparently controlled from this village, and our guide would not leave until the Deputy Hakim had agreed to send word up the valley that we were to have an armed guard, two horses, and a man to go with us.

While these negotiations were going on we remained sitting in the bus out of the sun, and had become the object of attention and excitement of the day. As the news of our arrival spread the villagers came up the hill towards us, and we were soon surrounded by a small crowd of men and children. The women kept within doors, for in this Muslim country they were not often seen by strangers, even by strange women. We saw heads rising above high walls or round corners at ground-level, but as soon as we glanced in their direction they disappeared. A barber set his box that was his stock-in-trade by the gutter and was soon busy. We were surprised when the men removed their turbans to see that their heads were quite close-shaven.

The few who wore forage-caps made of karakul lamb had European haircuts. Turbans were obviously a matter of pride, for although they were of extremely delicate colours, they were nearly all scrupulously clean.

At last we were able to continue on our way, but the deteriorating surface of the road resulted in a puncture about midday. We all got out while repairs were being effected and sat down by the side of the streamlet running alongside the road. A few children were leaping from side to side in play, and in the distance we could see mud houses huddled together. We tried to make friends with the children; the boys were as 'bold as brass' and talked to us animatedly, not realizing that we did not understand a word they said; but the girls were shy. They were all barefooted, and wore long frocks over baggy trousers; a shawl draped round their unkempt hair was quickly pulled over the face if they thought we were scanning them too closely; many had red paint round their eyes, and all wore bits of jewellery round the neck, in the ears, and on the arms. None were very clean, and collectively they had an unpleasant odour which deterred one from going too close—even had one been able: as soon as we took a step towards them they turned and ran, and this soon became a good game.

Women left their mud huts and came towards the stream, remaining at a discreet distance, regarding in silence this unusual scene. One woman in red, squatting half hidden in the Indian corn, gradually wormed her way towards us, hastily dropping down if she thought we had noticed her. Later on, when time had made us less unfamiliar, I tried to take photographs of the people, but only succeeded in taking one, bolder than the others, who posed coyly, and, immediately the shutter clicked, held out her hand for the photograph. It was impossible to explain that these had to be developed and printed, but we did manage to convey the idea that they had to go back to Kabul.

By one o'clock the car repairs were effected, and we set off again along the road. At a wayside stall we were able to buy diminutive eggs which were cooked on the spot in a kettle and carried along with us. Later we stopped at a chaikhana in the little village of Bazara, and were invited to sit on the Afghan

rug spread over the earth floor. While we drank tea and consumed eggs a young man played for us on his home-made musical instrument. He had attached a tin can to the end of a long wooden stick along which ran two wires, and had made a bow by fastening hairs plucked from a horse's tail to the two ends of a bent twig. He produced pleasant music by drawing this across the wires, positioning the instrument either as a fiddle or a 'cello. Later a little boy of about four years was persuaded to execute a slow rhythmic dance to its tune.

Hunger and thirst satisfied, we proceeded on our way, and another hour brought us to the village of Zenēh, which spread for some distance along the right bank of the Panjshir. We drew up outside a sandstone building, in front of which were lounging some Mongolian-featured men in light khaki cotton uniforms of European military pattern. We later learnt that these were men of a Hazara regiment, serving as the police of the district. A smart young man wearing the grey forage-cap, which in the villages we had come to associate with men in authority, came forward, introducing himself as Karimboula, deputy commander in the police headquarters at Zenēh. He had a long conversation with Gul, at the end of which we were told that the bus would now return to Kabul, and that the next day we should be provided with horses for the transport of our baggage; this would cost 600 afghanis (£6), which we were to hand over at once. We withdrew a short distance to extract the necessary money, for we did not want them to see our thick wad of notes, and when we returned we were told that another 300 afghanis would be necessary for five donkeys to carry the baggage as far as the point where we should pick up the horses. We were suspicious that this was only an excuse to get more money, but we were in their hands and could not argue. Fortunately, as it turned out, we insisted on a receipt for our afghanis. Karimboula was now extremely polite and said that he was arranging for a soldier to come with us for our protection.

Gul Mohammed bade us farewell, and set off back to the excitements of Kabul. Now we really were left to our own resources! Clutching the Persian phrase-book given to us at the British Embassy, I looked questioningly at Karimboula. He made the gesture of sleeping, pointed up the hillside, and then



pointed to our luggage and showed the entrance to an empty storeroom, from which pantomime I gathered that we were to sleep that night on the hillside, and our luggage would be guarded by the soldiers below. Watched by a group of intensely interested soldiers, we extracted from the baggage what we should need for the night on the hillside, putting on one side a tent, groundsheets, sleeping-bags, stove, tea and food, and a bag of personal items. Six men seized each a piece and prepared to escort us.

By a path, worn by generations of feet into the hillside, we walked alongside a little torrent, up and up, until we reached a stone ruin on a promontory overlooking the valley. We were invited to enter through a beautifully carved door set into an ornamented framework, and found ourselves in a small courtyard. A flight of stone steps, attached to nothing on either side, led up to a gallery, three sides of which were still standing. Flinging open a door at the far end, the first soldier invited us to enter. We stepped down into a room about fourteen feet square, completely covered by a handsome Afghan rug. At the far end a casement window devoid of glass framed the opposite steep brown hillside, with a drop of a thousand feet below. The room was almost empty, with a telephone in the middle of the carpet. This was the only one in the village, the end of a line, and was manned day and night by the police. Two mattresses were brought from an adjacent room and put down one on each side of the telephone: on these we were invited to recline. The six soldiers stood in the doorway peering over each other's shoulders and craning their necks to see the effect. There was an admiring silence for a few minutes, and then one of them stepped forward with a white goat's-hair switch, waving it gently backward and forward in front of my face to clear away the myriads of flies. I felt like the Queen of Sheba and was at a loss what to do next, but felt something had to be done when the remaining men came in and squatted on the floor in silence, watching our every movement and expression. Eleanor moved over to my mattress, and we discussed how best we could get rid of them, but even with the help of the phrase-book "Go away! We don't want men staring at us all night," was too difficult in Persian, and we decided to proceed as if they were

not there. We took the food-bag from the man who was still nursing it tenderly, and extracted a packet of tea. With a murmur of "chai" one of the men held out his hand for the packet and disappeared outside with it. A crackling of flames told us that there was no need to light our stove.

Ten minutes later the aristocratic Karimboula appeared in the doorway followed by two men, one in Europeanized clothes and one in hanging shirt over baggy trousers. The soldiers sprang smartly to attention and hung upon his every word. He sat down on the empty mattress and set a plate of mulberries by the telephone. A large spittoon on a pedestal was placed conveniently near his head and tea was brought in. For the next half-hour we drank tea and ate fruit in leisurely fashion interspersed with a few words of conversation. We were by this time hungry and brought out our eggs, signifying that we should like them cooked. A soldier took them outside and soon brought them back, spreading a white piece of cloth on the floor before setting them down. He offered us chupatties, but we were as yet rather suspicious of all food, and politely declined, extracting some of our biscuits and nibbling these instead. We did, however, enjoy a sweetmeat rather like popcorn. We would have put butter on our biscuits, but when the tin we were carrying with us was opened the contents were found to be completely melted, and could by no means be persuaded to stay on a smooth surface. An orderly, in the meantime, took over the job of dispersing the myriads of flies who hoped to share our meal. Karimboula made many calls, during which we had a chance to examine him. Over trousers and loose shirt he had a handsome robe of green-and-yellow pin-stripe cloth reaching down to his knees. His grey fur cap was set jauntily on the side of his head, and we never saw him without it. His skin was white, tanned by a continuous sun: in another setting he might have passed for a southern European.

By 7 P.M. it was getting dark, and, as we could not get rid of the men, we decided to go outside and wash, ready for bed. From now on it was to be very difficult to find a secluded corner for any toilet purposes. If one squatted in front of a big boulder a head would invariably appear above it; if one descended into the bed of a streamlet one would look up on to a blank wall

from which a veiled head would quickly disappear and as quickly reappear when one was occupied with other things. In time we grew accustomed to this, but at first it was a bit embarrassing and disconcerting! In this instance I went down to the path and diverged from it to the stream, which seemed secluded at this point. I put out my washing things on a near-by rock and proceeded to divest myself of my upper garments. It was then that I saw two children standing twenty feet above me. I took no notice but continued to undress, but when these were joined by two others I made signs to them to go away. This they did, and, much relieved, I washed the top half of my body. As I put on my blouse, I noticed that the flat roof of the stone building upstream which I had not at first noticed was now alive with women and children. Turning my back to them, I sat down and washed my feet, but felt some compunction about the middle part of the body. When men came down the path and branched off to approach me I gave up, put on my boots and socks again, and went back to our eyrie.

Eleanor suggested that we should go down to the village street, wander away from the main road, and find seclusion. Unfortunately one of the soldiers insisted on accompanying us, and we could not shake him off! After several attempts I tried the ruse of holding back while Eleanor went ahead, as he obviously could not be with both of us at once. This worked fairly well, but there were other people to contend with besides the soldier. By holding a group in conversation for five minutes I was able to give Eleanor a chance to disappear down by the stream, and she did the same for me later on.

On our return we found that an oil-lamp had been lit in our 'bedroom,' and Karimboula had gone. One soldier, however, insisted on staying. We appreciated that some one would have to answer the telephone, but thought it unnecessary to man it all the time. In the end, by continuously pointing to the door, we got him outside, shut the door, and set our boots against it. We lay down on the mattresses, one on each side of the telephone, had the spittoon removed, and tried to sleep. Although it was very hot and many flying insects annoyed us, we slept reasonably well till 6 A.M., when it was light enough to sit up and write up our diaries. To my horror, my arms and neck



were covered with red blotches: I at first thought they might have been caused by the flying insects, but, as Eleanor (who was always the first to get bitten) had no marks, I was forced to the conclusion that the biters had come out of the bolster which one of the soldiers had so kindly put under my head!

At 7 A.M. tea and boiled eggs were brought in by one of Karimboula's attendants of the night before, and by 8 A.M. we were ready to depart. The six soldiers carried our belongings down to the roadway and put them with the rest of the luggage, which by this time had been assembled. We had finished with roads and wheeled traffic, and for many weeks would rely only on our own feet to carry us forward into the heart of Afghanistan.

*Dasht-i-Revat, and Onward*

**W**E left Zenēh at 9.15 on the morning of August 24. It had been a strange experience, in our eyrie on the hill, a mixture of primitive living and exquisite Oriental courtesy, with plenty of things to give us many a laugh!

When we came to supervise the loading of the animals there were only *four* donkeys instead of five; another, they said, was not available anywhere. I was very worried about this, as I felt there was far too much weight for the little beasts. Skilful packing and a good balance on either side can ensure that a donkey does carry with apparent ease a weight of many kilos. But from much experience of the treatment of donkeys—or, rather, ill-treatment of them—one finds that little consideration is shown for them anywhere, in the East particularly. Having so recently had reason to observe a donkey's cleverness, in getting me off Demavend, I felt I now owed the genus a special debt. (As has been truly said, it is only a stupid person who thinks a donkey stupid.) I was therefore in no mood to tolerate overloading or active ill-treatment.

However, we had been given the impression by our English-speaking sirdar up at Zenēh that the donkeys were "only just to take us to the horses" at a village farther on. (This proved later, however, to be a sheer invention.) So we made our views quite clear to the men; I helped to share out the weights, which I knew, and we set off.

With our four donkey-men and our soldier, and various hangers-on who gradually left us and returned home, we passed through many hamlets, or tiny collections of 'houses,' mud-brick and wood at this distance from the mountains; later we found these were just some huts of stones, such as early man might have made when he could not find a cave. Sometimes the wooden doorposts, or even the door itself, might have some quite fine carving, done long ago. Possibly these distinctions

singled out the home of a former chieftain, even now probably the headman of the tiny community. These groups of habitations were always well shaded, with the ground well terraced for irrigation. Most of the trees were mulberries. The fruit is almost the staple food of the Afghan peasant—fresh in summer, dried for the winter. As we passed women would be holding outstretched, very large hand-woven blankets of dark material (normally of natural goat's-hair) to catch the showers of ripe fruit which men and boys in the branches shook down. As we smiled and looked on with real interest the women would first shyly hide their faces—they were not veiled at all, right in the country (just the one-piece flowing garment, scarf-like over their heads)—then, with laughing eyes and lips, they would offer us a saucerful of the fruit. Its food value must be largely in the sugar content, for it is so sweet as to be quite sickening, with a flavour that suggests perfume! Most of the berries are white; a few are a reddish colour.

We soon seemed to leave human dwellings far behind. The scenery was extraordinarily varied. One could say with truth that nowhere was the Panjshir river not beautiful; very swift-flowing, it had a strange clarity everywhere, so that it was well-nigh impossible to gauge the depth easily. Sometimes the mountains would be sheer down to the water, then, quite suddenly, they would seem to fall away, and there would be a wide, intensely green valley—and then, of course, little dwellings, isolated, or in quite large collections, would appear again and the land would be well cultivated.

We kept going until well after midday, and the heat and glare were excessive. We found, however, two shady groups of trees where the road was flat and widened out; this was a good place to relax, and the donkeys were unloaded. There happened to be a very heavily laden mulberry-tree, and a small boy from Zenēh, who had attached himself to us permanently, it seemed, climbed up into the branches and shook down the fruit—which, of course, we were offered. Already I seemed to have some stomach trouble, and neither of us really wanted any solid food; these mulberries were not calculated to quench a dreadful thirst. But it was good to rest; and shade for nearly two hours was heaven-sent. However, we could not linger any longer, and



on we went. In spite of any physical disabilities, the scenery impressed itself on one's eyes and mind. It was unusual, and not for long the same type: sometimes so savage-looking, with craggy rock and barren landscape; then there would be wide-open stretches where nature had been kind, and there was a chance for the peasant to live off that land.

Sometimes the going was very hard, up and down steep and narrow, not to say dangerous, paths (for the loaded animals) on the sides of the mountainous shores of the river: we were never out of sight of it. My personal discomfort was doubled by the now only too active realization of what I had feared—that our animals were seriously overloaded. I vowed that never again should this happen, for there were several falls, and, to put it at the very lowest level, this delayed the caravan and annoyed the men. They were not a very likeable quartet; and the soldier who formed part of our train was the one to whom we had both taken a dislike at Zenēh, by far the least pleasant of the six or seven soldiers, all strangely Mongolian-looking, who surrounded us there. The five of them were, at this stage, so lazy they would not carry one single thing. Rucksacks, ice-axes, we could carry; and though we had stipulated that the kerosene, in two-gallon cans, was *not* to be put with the stores on the donkeys—because we found that, with all the jolting, the cans leaked on to our foodstuffs—we needed eternal vigilance to see that they were not stowed surreptitiously among the packs, so that they need carry nothing. The soldier would not carry even one vacuum flask.

It does say something for our personal relationships and perhaps for our example, as Joyce and I did not mind carrying things ourselves, that later, in the Hindu Kush itself, this same soldier really showed team-spirit, carrying *anything*, and doing anything required of him, with a good nature of which one could never have believed him capable. These particular donkey-men we had for only a few days; but even they improved in several ways; and when we did finally see them again after weeks of absence they greeted us with positive affection!

We passed through one or two more villages; and, to our surprise, we saw, across the narrow street of one we were approaching—a bus! One of those gaily painted affairs we had

come to know. It seemed to have broken down, and, indeed, there was a second one in view, and quite a vast concourse of people for the size of place. Of course, our train was halted (needs must be so!), and we found ourselves entering a chaikhana—quite the smokiest place in which I have ever drunk tea! It was really very dark, with a very low door and an earth floor, and Joyce and I squatted on a blanket (our men had vanished elsewhere—except for our guarding soldier!). The charcoal smoke nearly blinded and choked us, and through a thick haze we saw many men crowding in, to add to the almost 'solid' atmosphere. However, the hot tea (the smoke seemed to have found its way into the liquid) was refreshing, up to a point; but I felt that if we did not get out soon I should be really sick, for lack of air, and our eyes were smarting badly.

When we finally emerged—the cost of the tea was negligible—we were greeted by a good-looking young man in the usual karakul forage-cap of the Muslim, when not wearing the turban or flat woollen hat. It seemed as if we had been expected, which was indeed the case. A carpet on a raised bank on the other side of the narrow street had been spread ready for us, and the whole village, old and young, gathered round us. The young man explained in English that he was from Kabul University, where he was studying Agriculture; this village was his home, and he had heard on the Afghan radio of our arrival, and he also produced a newspaper with our photographs. Would we not go to his home and drink tea there? He would spread rugs for us! But by this time it was getting late, and we had to halt for the night. We thanked him warmly, and there was much hand-shaking all round.

The next thing we knew was that we were being pressed into the bus that seemed to be just preparing to depart! Our men and donkeys seemed to have vanished again, but by gesticulations we were assured all was in order! Soon the habitual mass of passengers were squeezing and shouting; and next we were rattling off downhill. After a few people had been set down here and there every one else got out, and so did we—and the bus turned back. (We had not been asked to pay.) It had been some help, for we were tired and hungry, and Joyce was now buoying us up with the thought of tinned fruit. We had, of

course, come to the conclusion that we had not now brought nearly enough, and that we would have it only on special occasions! This would certainly be one of these—our first proper meal since we started our real foot-slog to the Hindu Kush. She would get some food ready; it all sounded wonderful. Meantime we had lost the cavalcade (and our baggage)! But we pressed on, and eventually we all linked up again.

Our way lay over a stony pass, not really suitable for a camp. However, I had just said to Joyce that, whatever the men said, it was after all *our* journey, and they were being paid by us, and we really should stop at the very next spot that seemed possible for a camp—and *eat*: my stomach seemed to be breaking in two; it was now after five o'clock. We suddenly seemed to emerge from a kind of gorge, and there below us, ahead, to our right was a lovely patch of very green grass, with a shady tree; and hurrying across it was a turbaned figure with a flowing robe of a very lovely shade of blue. This was no lone traveller—he belonged there! He crossed the road and vanished round a corner. It must be a village. Sure enough, a few yards more—and then the most lovely, welcome sight possible met our eyes.

To our left, round that corner, was a large green sward surrounded by tall trees, and to the left of it was a rushing, gurgling stream, which, as a matter of fact, we found, almost circled this idyllic 'village green,' which lay in a kind of basin of rocks and trees, with quite a number of stone dwellings on the perimeter. In an angle was a high waterfall, dropping into yet another stream. There was a scene of great animation, and then we saw why the whole village was out. *There* was the grey Volkswagen Utility van, and the four German fellows we had met at Herat—now halted for the night. We had seen their grey car apparently broken down, beyond Zenēh: they had probably passed when we were in the chaikhana!

We had certainly found the perfect haven for the night. The blue-robed figure came forward to greet us—again as if he were expecting us; and this was the case. Visitors obviously mean an occasion for any village. This distinguished-looking, bearded figure proved to be a very important person, the owner of much land, a kind of mayor. He brought out a beautiful carpet, and



spread it out for us; then followed a new, wadded quilt, and later a second one.

Joyce found a sheltered spot between the great roots of a shady tree by the rushing stream from the waterfall, and eventually got the stove going, after a slight catastrophe. One or two among the men of the village—its name was Dasht-i-Revat—thought they knew something about it, and were most anxious to assist—only to set the whole thing ablaze! However, we did get a good meal, and tea; and by that time it was almost dark.

It was such a glorious night that there was no need to pitch a tent: we would sleep under the stars which were appearing, and we should be very happy on our carpet, with our wadded quilts! Every one was most solicitous for our comfort. Our men and donkeys had, of course, arrived finally with us. The donkeys had been unloaded and tethered (so that they should not wander on to our 'bed'), and we had already made arrangements to have three more donkeys next day for the next stage of our trek. The horses had proved mythical.

The four Germans had another 'pitch' within view, for sleeping—but they did not indulge in this for many hours to come! All the village seemed to be staying out in honour of all the guests. It was a wonderful scene, of which I shall ever have a mind's-eye picture. We were both very tired, but I think a great thankfulness for arriving and the lovely surroundings had revived me so much (not to mention our meal) that I had no further desire for sleep. Joyce fell asleep very quickly, but it was restful just to be still, and I watched the proceedings, which continued most of the night!

Torches were carried about, though the starlight itself was quite brilliant, and little groups of Afghans were squatting around drinking chai. The Germans seemed to be eating for hours, and were joined by various Afghans, and all seemed to be playing some game at times. But one or other of the Germans kept going to fetch something or other from the Volkswagen—and violently slammed the door every time. Yet Joyce slumbered on—truly a great gift to be able to sleep so soundly when one really needs sleep. Our men sat and talked all night round a fire they lit. We were to learn that, away from the towns, the

Afghan does not use the night for sleep if there is anyone to whom he can talk; he usually takes so many sleeps during the hotter hours of daylight that it is presumably unnecessary to sleep if he can sit round a fire in the colder hours of night.

We had arranged to leave about 7.15 next morning, but we had to await the new donkeys, and it was nine o'clock before we got away. We were thus able, while waiting, to have a further chat with the Germans, all four from Berlin. They hoped to go to the Anjuman Pass, and not to Mir Samir; they were keeping a very expensive, German-speaking courier with them, from Kabul. They had an enormous amount of baggage, and were *expecting* to get seven horses from Dasht-i-Revat about 9 A.M.

Soon after we left the village all pretence to a road vanished. No vehicle could go beyond this. The land was surprisingly fertile at times. There were many apricot-trees and much sweet corn, yet almost without warning we would find ourselves in great gorges, with rock towering more than a thousand feet above us. Then the river would seem swifter than ever, churned through its narrow channel. It would seem like the sea, beating up from below. Or again, at times, we would be at the same level, and the water would be literally lapping round our feet as we clambered over loose or slippery rock, so turbulent was this rapid river. Occasionally there would be stretches of silvery sand, with little islands, too—suggesting the tropic sea-shores.

Although it was extremely hard going for the donkeys, it is on routes such as this that one realizes their superiority over the horse, as a transport animal. We hardly ever saw the useful mule; I have never had the slightest trouble with mules. As has been truly said, only centuries of ill-treatment has made the mule 'obstinate.' True co-operation between man and beast can work wonders. The donkey, like the mule, has such a small hoof—only at a disadvantage, to the point of danger, on snow—that it picks its way in a manner that can best be described as 'dainty,' managing not to damage itself—if it is not *driven* to stumble. We had reason to notice this great difference when later on we had pack-horses, on less evil terrain. All managed to gash themselves in various stumbles, and they were not being

overdriven. We had only one new man for our three new donkeys, and he was a much pleasanter type, with finer features and an elegant pale green turban. He did not own all the animals, but had some care and thought for them.

We had to pass through a number of defiles in the rocks in order to get a path above the water. These were so narrow that it was obvious even to our not very bright men that the width of the animal's pack could not be made to go through, and they had to unload the willing little beasts. I brought up the rear to keep an eye on the way the animals were dealt with. It is no use having one set of principles for London and another for Afghanistan. From Zenēh onward I had thrown many sticks and goads into the river, and, example being better than precept, I had shown that by taking the animal's head and giving a pat or stroking its nose I could succeed where they failed, with their brutality. However, custom dies hard and, although they were improving, some one tried the impossible: to get a loaded beast through an incredibly narrow, and very steep and rough, passage between rocks. Naturally, the wretched creature slipped and fell, stretched on its belly, to the fullest extremity, from front hooves to back ones, the load ensuring that it could not possibly rise.

Unlike many Afghans, these men seemed to have no reasoning powers whatever, and I arrived on the scene of great commotion to find them beating, kicking, prodding, twisting tail and ears: unimpeded they would probably have continued till it died; no power on earth could have got it up, loaded as it was. Joyce was on in front, and some men had gone through sensibly enough. I did not care if we stayed there for hours—but it was not necessary. I pushed the men off, raging furiously at them, in English with the odd Farsi word here and there; they understood perfectly. And when I stroked the donkey's head and began dragging off the kitbags and boxes they immediately began to help me! The last thing thrown off, the game little beast made a really colossal effort and managed to rise. I led it through in triumph, and we reloaded quickly, little time lost. Strangely enough, the men were far more friendly after that. At a subsequent defile they actually waited for me to lead the donkey through it.



When I was ill once, as a child, my mother had read to me Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which made a lasting impression on me. The lines

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all

have always formed part of my religion. One of the greatest men in the world, Albert Schweitzer, is surely right in his philosophy of Reverence for Life.

The tragedy of the Albatross had lingered particularly in my childish mind because of a still earlier incident. Just once before his death a great-uncle, Captain James Horne, last Commodore of his line (of sailing-ships) and mentioned in the seafaring works of the late Sir David Bone, had sat by my cot before I went to sleep, and told of an albatross that had come down on his ship, the *Loch Garry*, in Southern seas. He was full of the spirit of the merchant-venturers: I am grateful that the same kind of spirit had sent me to Afghanistan; although I have yet to see an albatross!

It was pleasant when about midday the men pointed to a lovely rocky incline down to the river, where it would be good to rest. They unloaded the donkeys, and lay down—in the glare of the sun. Joyce and I managed to get a very little shade under a high rock some distance away; and we got a very pleasant wash in the limpid water, and next bathed our tired and dusty feet. How good it was to relax; I think I had picked up some germ with heat and dust, for I had a kind of 'fur' on my tongue and mouth. I did not feel sick at all, but my stomach *ached*. However, complete relaxation was not for long!

Earlier, after I had dealt with a very obvious sore on one of the donkeys, our newest and best donkey-man had removed his sandal, to show a bad place on his foot, which I disinfected and dressed. To the small boy who had attached himself to us I had given many indications that he could go home if (copying his elders) he ill-treated the donkeys. The final effort was entirely successful. I seized the newest stick with which he had again managed to arm himself, gave him a good prod and a slap with

it (which did *not* seriously hurt him, but surprised him beyond measure!), and broke and threw it into the river, mentioning and indicating by dumb show that what was 'good' or 'bad' (some of my meagre Farsi vocabulary) for him was the same for the donkey—at the same time pointing fiercely backward to indicate his home village. But no, he was now more devoted than ever, and came to me, when we had next halted, to have *his* foot dressed—demonstrating how he stroked the donkey!

So now, apparently, a passer-by must have been told something of this 'travelling dispensary,' for, coming off his route past our men, we perceived an elderly man bearded and turbaned, *very* ragged, walking towards us. We smiled, and he bared his left arm, which was covered with a filthy rag; underneath this were a number of mulberry leaves, sodden with blood and pus, which he threw down. The flesh beneath was a truly horrible sight—the gory, suppurating surface dyed green in parts. Being completely ignorant ourselves of the qualities, healing or poisonous, of the mulberry leaf, we intimated that it was 'not good' in Farsi; and—as ever after we were to do endlessly—impressed on him the necessity for *washing* the sores in *clean* water. He went down to the river and did this reasonably well, so that it was not such a gruesome sight. By a fortunate chance (for all our supplies were with the men and animals), Joyce had a tube of antiseptic ointment in her jacket pocket, and I had a clean crepe bandage which was really not much help to my damaged hand. She applied the ointment on a piece of clean cotton-wool which I had left over from my previous dressings of man and beast; and we bound him up. His gratitude knew no bounds, and showed clearly in his shining eyes. We reiterated our theories about leaves and clean water, shook hands warmly, and he departed—but not before he had craved the boon of our last (miserably badly made) vacuum flask (bought in Kabul), which had fallen to pieces and which we had thrown away behind a stone. We pointed out that the glass was jagged and dangerous; it made no difference—it was of value to him (such is their dire poverty).

All too soon we had to move on; and from this point we waded across the river where it happened to be very shallow. Only the lazy soldier did not want the trouble of removing

his boots, so got one of the men to carry him across on his back! We had not gone far when we had to cross back—this time on a perilously shaky bridge, in order to get a path. At a second bridge we followed the right arm of the river.

The men kept intimating that we must get to Parian. This, of course, is an entire district—so that every village to which we came was 'Parian,' but *not* our final goal for the real trek to Mir Samir. Whatever they had in mind (it was the village of Kaujan), it was impossible to get there that day. Sometimes, for sheer lack of space to pass, we, and our seven donkeys more especially, and five men, were held up on very narrow paths by hundreds of sheep, and sometimes goats, going into single file and a train that could be a mile long. They were luckily not very nervous creatures, but for the most part these sheep were very large, with the extraordinary kind of double rump that bobbed up and down as they moved, which seemed to take the place of the fat tail of the sheep in Iran, no real 'tail' being apparent. In colour these were mostly brownish—but ranged from a *café au lait* shade to black. They stood very high from the ground; they had narrow faces, and their long, flapping ears were mutilated in all kinds of patterns, presumably for purposes of identification. If there were creamy-coloured sheep (never really *white*), their wool was often dyed into fantastic patterns, in turquoise-blue, violent pink, purple, orange, and so on. Sometimes too, nearer the villages, they would be decorated with bows of ribbon or material; two beribboned black ones had followed us about at Zenēh. Meeting a camel-train, however short, was even more awkward, for each animal takes up so much room, and cannot conveniently bound out of the way like a sheep or goat.

At last, as it was getting towards dusk, we passed a field where a woman was weaving a large cloth blanket. Her husband came after us to explain, by dumb show chiefly, that she had a sore throat. All that we could get at easily was my packet of fruit gums. (After this day of medical treatments we carried more accessible supplies for our Afghan contacts.) I demonstrated how the fruit gum should be sucked—not chewed!—for he seemed never to have seen a sweet before; but he certainly liked his sample one, and took back (I hope)



to his wife several more. We also saw again our man with the festering arm. He greeted us with enthusiasm, and said it was much better.

A field, not far on after we had seen the woman weaving, proved to be the one where the men intended to camp for the night. We did not think a tent necessary, and once more decided to sleep under the stars—on very stony ground. There was no human habitation anywhere near; but, still, many caravans of animals, with their herdsman, passed, raising much dust. In a cornfield behind our stony camp Joyce managed to get the stove going, out of the wind that was springing up, while I tended the animals. Before I asked, one of the men actually took off a pack-saddle—to show me the donkey's back: it was very raw. Now I managed to show by my expression, gestures, and a few words that it was sad for the animal; but I showed no more annoyance or anger—just tried to improve things—and then, to my joy, all the men removed the pack-saddles and came and asked me to look at the other donkeys, pointing anxiously to bad backs, proudly to two others—one *almost*, the other *quite*, sound! I felt happy at this progress; it is always worth trying to give civilized ideas of kindness to those who have never practised them, largely because of ignorance and poverty. I managed to tackle three backs before dark; the rest I dressed at 5.45 A.M. next day. It was not too comfortable a night, and still cold when we left at 7.15 A.M.

The valley of Parian was extremely lovely, and the villages were more numerous, and most picturesque—almost all, oddly enough, on the *other* side of the river from ourselves. The Afghan peasant is really hard-working and extracts all he, or she (for the women work everywhere), can from the good earth. In some places there was quite a green patchwork of small, well-cultivated fields.

The heat was really rather terrible; and the 'fur' in my mouth had now as a companion a loathsome 'glue' round my lips. Joyce noticed this, but there seemed nothing we could do about it. Whenever I saw a little group of trees, how I longed to sink down in their kindly shade! We ought to have stopped; it was foolish to go on with no food since a very meagre breakfast, five hours earlier; but no, the men kept on, with some idea

of their own. At last I lay down, for even a few moments' shade! To my joy, Joyce came back from the front of our train to suggest I moved "three trees farther on": there was something worth seeing apparently!

I had chosen practically the right spot. All this land proved to be the property of a smiling, bearded man in a greenish-black turban, who came forward to greet me, having already spread a large carpet (the traditional Afghan welcome—if they own one) to receive us properly. He had probably been watching our procession drawing near. All his relations and friends appeared to be about, longing to do us honour, it seemed. Higher up the slight slope four oxen were threshing corn.

More carpets were brought, and, as I had very gladly and thankfully lain down on my new soft bed, rugs were spread over me! I was quite literally being 'tucked up in bed'—every inch of me was being covered. This was obviously not for warmth, nor do I think that our host thought my bare legs not quite fit to be seen—though he did take extra pains over those! I am quite sure he did not wish one stray ray of the sun to touch me, particularly the unclothed part; for I had pointed to the sun overhead (now hardly visible through the interlaced branches), to my own head and my swollen lips, to explain my desire to rest; and he nodded complete understanding. Such is the speed of thought—I was back in Iceland, being 'tucked up in bed' by an Icelandic farmer, after he and his wife had given me and seven Icelanders the most amazing hospitality, when we had all but died of *cold*(!) and exposure, following near-drowning in a flooded glacial river during a gale. In the most violently contrasted circumstances, how *very* good is what is the same in every corner of the earth—kindness of heart.

Great quantities of tea were brought, which roused me most pleasantly; and all the many small handleless bowls brought, and proper teapots (not tin kettles or saucepans), proclaimed some prosperity. But for once, even in such heat, our real need was for something more solid.

With a stomach obviously in "an unusual state of being," and a gullet incapable of coping with anything of any degree of hardness—porridge was an inspiration! The Scotch oats, compounded with first-rate dried milk made liquid, seemed at

this juncture to be the most delicious, manageable food in the world. Even Joyce, the Sassenach(!), with no previous love of it, was quite converted to her own opportune dish. A distinguished and very wealthy Scot (once a poor boy) was asked by another Scot (also distinguished but not wealthy), a literary man of my acquaintance, to what the former attributed his success. The brief answer was "porridge." It proved the answer in our case!

Our host had pointed up the hillside to his home, and suggested that we might perhaps prefer to proceed there; but we were happy where we were, and in any case must soon be moving on if we were to arrive at our last village before dark. He next touched my hand and pointed to his eyes, which were indeed very inflamed, and intimated that they were very bad: he obviously was wanting me to try to do something for them. There is, as in most Eastern countries, much eye-trouble—probably the result of the dust and the sun's glare, dirty water, and, in general, complete lack of care. It seems strange that often, with some beautiful, swift-flowing stream near by, they will choose to wash, or even 'clean' their teeth, in some filthy gutter by the roadside.

I called for some hot water, and demonstrated, by miming bubbles and steam—which they did understand, for they do boil it for tea-making—that the water *must* be boiled. This was procured and cooled, and I could but bathe the eyes safely with some boracic, and tell him to go on bathing them, with *clean* water, pointing to the dust underfoot and the blazing sun above, as the culprits to be avoided.

Next they brought a child to me with dreadful skin trouble all over the closely shaved head: which was cause, and which effect, I could not know—whether a dirty implement had started the disease, or the hair had been shorn off because of it. I bathed it and dabbed on antiseptic ointment with clean cotton-wool; and I also left the man clean wool to dab his eyes. Then there was an array of people pressing heads and stomachs, to whom we gave appropriate pills—hoping that faith healing would also play its part. The trust they placed in us and our remedies was very touching.

Lastly some one brought along another child with a *withered*



*Shamaz Nun, Headman of  
Kaujan, and Fiezela, our  
Soldier Guard*



*Nao Ruz (with the  
pH meter) and his  
Two Sons*

*See page 143.*



*Mir Samir. Isolated  
Peak of the Hindu Kush,  
from "the Promontory"*

*See page 151.*







*Ice "Fences" on Schönblick*

*See page 190.*

*Relaxation at the Outpost*

*See pages 181-182.*





arm like a little stick. Joyce explained to them that we were not doctors. . . . I doubt if any medical or surgical aid could ever have altered that arm. It made one very sad. The scarcity of medical aid is one of the grimmest things in Afghanistan. One can only hope and pray that the few medical pioneers such as we had met in Kabul will spread their gospel of human service to mankind far and wide, that others may join them in their work of mercy.

It was, fortunately for us, not very much farther to the village of Kaujan, and we had had a wonderful period of rest and refreshment. Our host decided to accompany us—part of the way anyhow. Every one was very friendly now; even our soldier, whom I had justifiably described as “an oaf,” went to the trouble of collecting apricots and green apples for us, and even going out of his way to swarm up the trees for extra ones: they seemed to be anyone’s property. Then, too, peas and beans were brought as offerings, for us to munch on this last lap.

Certainly it was with a great measure of relief and thankfulness that we heard the announcement at last that we were just approaching Kaujan; and there it was, most of the houses to our right, down towards the river. The village consisted of a few houses built of loose stone on both sides of a muddy little ‘street,’ with about sufficient room for one pack animal to squeeze past the walls. We all went the length of it until it ended in a rather precipitous dip to the river. The whole population—man, woman and child—was out to see us, some smiling shyly, then fading away, others standing their ground to see this strange sight. When one came to think of it, it *was* strange, and probably never in the history of the village had such a visitation been received before: two lone women, from another land (another *world* from theirs), with masses of luggage and a train of Afghans.

We stopped, because there was nothing else to be done, except end up in the river or retrace our steps; and smiles and handshakes all round put everything on a friendly footing. A woman was teasing out some wool and spinning it—in her hands. A happy little crippled man was cobbling some ‘shoes.’ Children came and peeped at us and laughed and hid.

Then a dazzling vision appeared! This was surely some one



out of the *Arabian Nights* or similar lore—yet he proved to be the headman of Kaujan, who had apparently been apprised of our coming, by the Police headquarters at Zenēh. We knew his name, from information at Dasht-i-Revat, as Shamaz Nun, and had been advised to seek him out. This proved unnecessary; here he was, to greet us. A light peach-coloured turban, surrounding the little bejewelled cap, crowned a truly distinguished and aristocratic head, with a face that held one's attention. Dark eyes, that smiled as much as the well-shaped mouth, widened to show two perfect rows of dazzlingly white teeth, a nose that could have been the chief feature of a Roman patrician's face, and a thick black curling beard, making the olive skin, with a touch of healthy colour, look almost creamy and European by contrast—these points one took in, as one whole, at a glance. A little above average height, with an athletic figure, and very beautifully shaped hands kept in perfect order, yet with nothing whatever that could be called effeminate about him—one wondered why on earth he was not gracing the boards of a London theatre! He was well dressed in the flowing cotton coat, split at the sides and showing a printed cotton lining, that is worn by the better-off Afghan of the country, who, unlike the townsman (very often) or student, has not adopted European dress, partially or entirely, with the karakul cap. A snowy-white shirt, with a kind of flowery waistcoat and loose trousers and coarse suède boots, completed the costume of this spectacular figure.

He greeted us warmly; then, as if all were prepared, he led us up the village street again; and nearly half-way up to the 'road' we had travelled, which virtually ended above the village—he stopped and opened a door into a very small building of rough stones. There were no windows, but inside in the right-hand wall was a very small door, with some carving on it, which was kept closed, but opposite us was a larger door, quite roughly made as for a farm building—which this tiny place looked to be. This door was open, and led on to a little 'terrace,' which again widened to the right into a patch of dry ground, running alongside a small rectangular building, with a flat roof built of a kind of cement and straw, different in shape and material from any other building in the village and more

isolated. At a much later date, when we saw this place again, we realized it must do duty as their mosque—entered by the small door (within, one room led into a second, and the walls had rough paintings of flowers on them). The terrace continued round the corner, in a second rectangle running along the back wall of the little building, whose fourth side was along a field of beans, and this continued in a five-foot wall which divided the terrace from the field.

All our baggage was brought through the little 'farm-building,' and carpets were spread too. As it was now early evening and we were feeling hungry again, Shamaz Nun had tea brought, and then Joyce got out the stove. Once more the kind assistance of only too willing helpers sent it up in flames, all the solder melted—and all supports were now gone, for good! Meantime the whole village seemed to be gathering on our 'terrace'—for this was to be our camping-ground for the night. The elders of the village came chiefly because this was an event, and everything must be seen, but some came, as always, in search of healing. On our way down from the road to the village a poor old woman had pointed pathetically to her eyes. We foresaw what surely came.

Either for beauty or because they think it does their eyes some good, some men and many women and even children have their eyes outlined with red dye. It may indeed be the cause of much of the eye-trouble and blindness—at least in part—it gets right under the eyelids, I found. We had hardly begun to unpack some necessary things when I was asked by one or two of our own men to deal with sores on their feet—some of them by no means recent, angry and festering. Another man of our train had his thumb-nails nearly covered by swellings full of matter. The little boy, too, had acquired some new sores; at one time he had been walking with one shoe (or what did duty for a shoe) on and one bare foot, the rough paths being preferable apparently to any pressure. Now, being able to procure boiling water—and for this Shamaz Nun was at our service—I could at least clean up things, with permanganate of potash and suchlike, and from our medical supplies apply clean bandages with some ointment.

At times I could hardly believe I had actually brought myself

to the point of doing this sort of thing. In civilized surroundings I would have done anything to avoid it, not only having no leanings to doing nursing or medical work, but an active distaste for it—almost a horror of it! Here, however, when Joyce was busy with other things, their pathetic appeal and subsequent gratitude triumphed. And, anyhow, One greater than I had washed people's feet. So it became a long succession of suffering people. Blind, 'fishy' eyes and other things like that needed miracles to cure them. But they did seem to understand my efforts and instructions regarding cleanliness, and most obviously appreciated my very real sympathy, for I was pretty near to tears at times, and they knew it. I could not help remembering that my pioneering grandfather, Dr William Gauld, had said that terrible eye-troubles were the scourge of China in the eighteen-sixties; perhaps here in Afghanistan some of his devoted love of medical and surgical work for suffering mankind in "the dark places of the earth" had got into my squeamish blood, after all—however amateurishly I was trying to alleviate pain in the smallest degree.

The 'clinic' went on until it was too dark to see—and a guttering candle was not very efficient light. So Joyce, who had heroically been dealing with the ruined stove and preparing things for the 'inner man,' called out that I really had better come and eat. There was a sense of repose here, and although my mouth was more thickly coated with this horrible 'fur' than ever, and I could speak only with difficulty, food and drink were needed and went down fairly well.

More carpets were now brought and taken round to the farther-back 'rectangle.' Our lazy soldier actually helped to pitch our tent there—for the night was growing colder—and we moved our goods round there. We settled in, but there was little hope of sleep for a long time: the 'village' also moved round to our new ground(!) and talk went on among themselves for hours. The wall that terminated our 'platform' (between us and the bean field) gave protection from a certain amount of wind that had got up. In front of us, on the long side of the rectangle (opposite the sheltering wall of the little flat-roofed building), was a drop of about ten feet into another field (from which our 'platform' was built up by a wall). At



least we could stand on the precipitous edge and clean our teeth! We could not get rid of the people who clustered round our tent—until eventually Joyce temporarily zipped down all the flaps, to intimate that we really were ‘not at home’(!), and that worked: they took the hint—a very broad one—and receded.

It must have been midnight when there was a renewed commotion. The four young Berliners had arrived here, and they were now being settled on the first ‘rectangle.’ We knew that we should be leaving in absolutely reverse directions in the morning: we, right, towards Mir Samir; they, left, towards the Anjuman Pass. It was fun, however, to see them once more. They had—one could almost say ‘of course’—been done out of two horses, after waiting until 4 P.M., instead of leaving Dasht-i-Revat just after us—at 9.30 A.M. They had had to manage with five horses instead of seven, and they certainly had a vast amount of ‘stuff’—mostly packed into about a dozen and a half very large and impressive-looking aluminium boxes, like small trunks or large suitcases. Some of their elegant equipment seemed to us a little superfluous—for those *not* possessed of a large Volkswagen(!)—such as a very fine plastic slop-pail, also the correct dishes for the table! To us food tasted just as good out of a billy-can, or its lid, even though we possessed a minimum number of plates; and, after all, there are limits to where a very large van can travel—in the Hindu Kush! But this was ‘German efficiency.’

In the morning, after Joyce had cooked a good breakfast, our donkey-men and their animals set off on their three-day trek back to Zenēh. We saw the Germans off, and then our four decent-looking horses arrived. Shamaz Nun was coming with us, and had a gun and cartridge-belt. I thought it was to shoot game, and asked him to leave it at home. He laughed, but drew his finger across his throat. We were going to see this gesture *many* times before we had left the Hindu Kush for good, *and* to understand its significance very clearly. But he obligingly and good-naturedly did as I suggested. It was the last time I ever made the request. We were going to feel the value of a gun (as a deterrent, anyhow!): one felt that “forearmed was forewarned,” to reverse the words of the proverb.

*Approach to Mir Samir*

As I stood on the far side of the little wooden bridge that separated us from Kaujan and gazed up at the rock-face on which were perched the homes of the people gathered to see us off I felt glad that we had come to Afghanistan. Our preoccupation for the next few weeks would be with climbing, with rock and snow, not much with people. We should live in isolation for some weeks, and should no doubt carry along with us into the remote mountains some of the habits and prejudices of our civilized lives. But I knew I should always be glad that in the last few days we had met and lived with the simple people of Afghanistan, men and women upon whom the impact of civilization had not yet come—who know little or nothing of the incursions of the Russians, the friendly aid of the Americans, and the indifference of the British to their country. Modern life had not yet touched them—they had never seen a tractor nor a train; possessed none of the simple comforts brought by electric light and power; and only a very few could read or write. They lived as their forefathers had done for many centuries, their physical, mental, and moral approach to life concerned only with survival. To them Kaujan, with its fifty or so inhabitants and rough stone walls, was the finest place on earth. The way of life of these people was primitive, their poverty, by our standards, extreme; yet we did feel that they were a proud, virile race, a people living a simple community life, contented with so little because they had never known plenty. How wretched by comparison were the poor of the big cities!

And so I turned my back on Kaujan and looked up at the mountains ahead. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills," said the Psalmist; and up there among the peaks of the Hindu Kush we should be very far from mankind and very near to God.

Our track wound round to the south-east, following the

contour of a hill, keeping close to a little stream which came tumbling down to join the rushing Panjshir. Kaujan was almost immediately lost to sight, and we soon passed beyond its cultivated strips to a wild country. On either hand rose bare hillsides where rocks had been worn by water and scratched out by sand into fantastic shapes. At one point it was as if a fort, complete with battlements and towers surrounded by huge perpendicular walls, had been cut out by the forces of nature. At another point blue-black rocks were piled in gigantic heaps against the clear sky, like coal at the pit surface.

Eleanor and I stepped out briskly and were soon well ahead of the horses, who picked their way carefully up the slope, each one watched over by its proud owner. Several kuchi encampments were tucked into the hillside; and at midday Shamaz Nun and the soldier, Fiezela (as we had now learned to call him), left the party to cross the stream and go up to one of them. They had some difficulty in recrossing higher up, so swollen were the waters at this point, and we saw that Shamaz Nun had difficulty in balancing on the rocks as he stepped gingerly from one to the other, carrying in his arms something large and black and obviously heavy. As he came nearer we saw that he was carrying a large wooden bowl. He invited us to partake of its contents. We were a bit dubious at first, but, once having sipped, we could not leave off: it was sheep's milk! The day was hot, and this was indeed good refreshment, the most delicious milk I have ever tasted!

All day we marched, and at five o'clock toiled up a steep incline of loose rocks, arriving on a plateau half filled with a green mere. Ahead rose another slope, down which a stream of some size came tumbling into the still waters of the lake. Beyond it rose the outline of Mir Samir, ever beckoning us on. My legs were getting weary after many hours of uphill work, and this seemed an ideal spot for a camp site, but it was not for me to decide. My hopes sank as Shamaz Nun struck out away from the water towards the steep slope, but rose again when he stopped just where the flat green sward met the rocky hillside. The horses were unloaded and let loose, sure sign that we were stopping for the night, and joyfully I got out the stove and lit it, knowing that the men would want tea. It did not function



so well in the rarer atmosphere, and it was half an hour before the billy boiled. In the meantime the men had got a dung fire going, which, if slow, was at least sure and eventually produced the same results.

For ourselves we were content with hot soup and biscuits; we had as yet little appetite. We had not recovered fully from the enervating climate and atmosphere of Kabul, and seemed to want only liquids. The thought of anything sweet, too, was loathsome; and it was many days before we were able to enjoy the chocolate and sweets we were carrying. Even at this height of about 12,000 feet a tent was unnecessary, so we blew up the air-mattresses and had a blanket handy in case it got cold in the night. Alas! Eleanor's mattress failed to hold the air, and we promised ourselves that next day when we had established a base camp we would really find out the cause. For this night she used one sleeping-bag to act as buffer against the hard ground and another as a pillow.

After what seemed a very long night of fitful slumber we got up with the sun and made tea. In view of the improved performance of the stove we proceeded to cook an excellent breakfast of porridge and coffee made with full-cream tinned milk. By this time the sun was already high, and as soon as the men had re-packed the horses we set off up the steep, stony slope ahead so as to finish our journey before the noon heat. We crossed one considerable snow-patch and fixed our eyes on a smaller one ahead. This brought us to the top of the ridge from which we looked down on a green valley narrowing towards a cirque two or three miles away. Along the western side ran two streams, merging here and there into delightful little pools which we thought would make excellent baths. In fact, the water was too icy for complete submersion, but on many a sunny day during our stay in the area we were able to wash both ourselves and our clothes with enjoyment. What a difference that sun made! On a day when it did not shine we had to do our writing and chores inside the tent, for hands and feet got quickly frozen. Shelter from the wind too was to be an important factor from now on.

We were delighted with the prospect before us, and ran blithely down the other side of the slope to find a good site for

the tent. This was to be our home for many days, and we were anxious to get established in the best possible position. After examination of the terrain we fixed on a spot close by the hill-side so as to get shelter from the wind and yet be not too far from the stream which would provide us with water for cooking and ablutions. An enormous boulder twenty feet high near by could provide shade on hot, sunny days and shelter on cold ones. Rain was a thing that did not concern us; yet we afterwards learnt that this was an extremely wet summer in Great Britain!

Among the rocks littered at the foot of the slope we found a sheltered corner for the stove and cleared a space for a 'kitchen,' which, if it did not contain all the latest modern conveniences, was at any rate compact and fulfilled the conditions laid down by all kitchen experts that everything must be within easy reach. We made a larder by removing one or two stones from a heap and burying butter and meat in the cool depths beneath. We threw a cover over the remaining pile of goods, and sat down to enjoy the beauty and peace of the scene.

The horsemen meanwhile had unloaded their beasts and were preparing to depart. The horses were to be left to graze here so as to be ready for our return at whatever time we chose, but the men were to return at once to their beloved Kaujan, all except old Nao Ruz and Nurnamad, who were to stay and carry for us. We always thought of Nao Ruz as old, for he had such a wrinkled face and so many grey streaks in his beard, but I do not think he was much over forty. He had two sons of about twelve and fourteen; but, of course, that is nothing to a man of seventy in these parts! He certainly proved a very good mountaineer, and, though not fast, could go on steadily all day, carrying quite a heavy load. Nurnamad was of heavier build and inclined to be morose and, as events proved, not at all reliable.

To our great sorrow Shamaz Nun had to leave us too, for he had to go down to Kaujan and on to Zenēh to report, but he promised to return in three days. We did our best to make him stay by offering him more and more afghanis, but it was evident that he took his duties seriously and had no option but to go. He was a very intelligent man, and seemed to be able to

gather the meaning of our halting Farsi very quickly. Before he left, therefore, we consulted him about the soldier, Fiezela, who was taciturn and miserable: he walked about shivering, a cloak clutched about him, and was constantly pointing to his mouth as, we suspected, a sign of hunger. We had begun to wonder whether we were expected to provide for him, although this had not been included in our bargain at Zenēh. Shamaz Nun told us that the soldier had no food with him and was living on what the Kaujan people could spare him—little enough! We therefore agreed that when Shamaz Nun returned in three days he should bring back with him a bag of flour from which chupatties could be made, and gave him thirty afghanis for the purchase, which he said would be ample. This extraordinarily intelligent headman was very anxious to learn some English, and before he went we had taught him numbers up to twenty, the names of many things around us, and a few expressions such as “Stand up,” “Stop,” and “Go on again.” He was the exception in that he could write, and he transcribed our English words into his notebook in flowing Arabic script. He said that he would know everything when he returned. We on our side learnt a corresponding number of Farsi words, which were to prove very useful in our dealings with the porters and the soldier.

Bidding us farewell, he set off down the slope, and, to our surprise, Fiezela followed him. We were not altogether sorry, for he was not much good to us, but Shamaz Nun was horrified. He came back to us and said it was the soldier's duty to remain and guard us, and he himself would write a note for me to sign which he would take down to Zenēh. This apparently said that the soldier's conduct was unsatisfactory, and he was no good to us. Armed with the note, he set off again, and we forgot all about them. Half an hour later Fiezela returned, and without a word joined the other two men in a round stone compound they had found near the camp.

The rest of the day was spent in establishing the camp. We showed the men how to put up the second tent, and Fiezela in particular seemed very pleased that he would have a shelter for sleeping. We made a pile of the stores after we had extracted those for immediate use and put a plastic cover we had brought



for this purpose, over the remainder, holding it down with stones. I then turned my attention to the stove. In the conflagration at Kaujan, the uprights had been tied on temporarily with string, but I saw on examination that this would never make a good job and there would always be the danger of collapse when a saucepan of food was put on top. The only thing was to balance the pans by some other means. I began to build stones around the stove, but it was very difficult to make a stable pile at just the right height to raise pans above the flame without being too far from it and so wasting heat. Nao Ruz proved himself very cunning at this feat of balance, and with great patience tried stone after stone till the structure was relatively secure. It was worth spending time on it now for this was to be our home for a while. We certainly had a second stove, but the pump did not fit tightly and the flame was consequently weak.

We seized the opportunity of our first day of relaxation to wash thoroughly both ourselves and our clothes. It was a great joy to have clear water so conveniently at hand and the hot sun to make drying easy. The rocks were soon draped with our undies, and heavy wool socks festooned the guy-lines of our tent. Then we turned our thoughts to a meal. We had not yet unpacked the packet of dehydrated food, so decided on oxtail soup with potato, followed by biscuits and jam. Coffee made with powdered milk was, as always, a welcome drink. By this time it was six o'clock and we prepared for bed, putting down the lightweight groundsheets and blowing up the air-mattresses. Eleanor's would not blow up at all, and, on examination, we found quite a large slit, presumably made by some sharp-pointed instrument. We were at a loss how to account for this, for it had been packed among clothes. Possibly a tent pole had been poked in at the last minute! However, it was an easy repair; one of our larger patches, carried for such an emergency, covered it completely, and we had no more trouble. We put torches, writing materials, and the book of crosswords conveniently to hand and got into our sleeping-bags. This was enough covering for the present, but we had a blanket at hand for the usual chill which came with the dawn. By the time we had everything arranged it was already dark; from now on we

found it necessary to get settled down by 7 P.M. For a short time we puzzled out crossword clues with the aid of the torch, but soon gave it up and settled down to sleep.

When we awoke at dawn Eleanor confessed that she had not had a good night and had an upset tummy. I took the breakfast into the tent, after which she felt better and strong enough to carry through the day's programme. We planned to get up to a height from which we could view the landscape and practise surveying. Nao Ruz shouldered the heavy photo-theodolite, and, to our surprise, Fiezela cheerfully carried the light wooden tripod and Eleanor's rucksack. The latter had to be tied on with string, for the strap had broken *en route* the previous day. Nurnamad, morose as ever, stayed to guard the camp.

We went up a gully to the north, passed under an overhanging cliff, and continued towards Mir Samir, which seemed ever to beckon us. After another hour's steep climb we found ourselves at midday on comparatively flat terrain eminently suitable for our purpose. The sun shone in a blue sky, and we spent a delightful hour basking in its warmth: I busied myself with the theodolite, adjusting screws and legs so that the tripod was steady and level on uneven ground. Eleanor dozed, and Nao Ruz gazed fascinated at the apparatus or just sat and stared into space. After a pleasant half-hour in the sun we were both able to enjoy the walk back to camp. Nao Ruz showed already on this excursion that he was a natural mountaineer and a good porter. We began to have hopes of the soldier too!

Back in camp in the early afternoon, we were in time to experiment with food. We decided to try one of the packets of dehydrated meat we had bought from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food. Selecting a packet two inches square by one inch in depth, we opened it with interest and found a solid block of light-brown substance. Following the directions on the packet, we soaked it in cold water for five minutes and then brought it to the boil on the stove, leaving it there a further four minutes. In the meantime we had soaked a packet of mixed vegetables, and added these to the mixture in the saucepan. We were delighted with the result, as this made a wonderful stew for us both. Next came the prunes we had put in to soak in the morning, and finally large cups of coffee.

Feeling replete and pleasantly tired, we prepared for bed. Although the temperature had dropped considerably, the men decided they would not sleep in the tent; wrapping their hand-woven cloaks around them, they lay down by their dung fire in a shepherd's corral, but not to sleep. An hour later they were at the tent door asking for "chai"<sup>1</sup> and "sheker,"<sup>2</sup> and voices and laughter came out of their corner for a long time.

The next day was spent in camp to give Eleanor time to recover, and to do the inevitable camp chores. From now on we took the temperature at sunrise, midday, and sunset. At Base Camp it rose to 93 degrees Fahrenheit in the midday sun, 74 degrees in the shade, and dropped as low as 10 degrees at night and early morning. Our altimeter told us that the camp was at 12,750 feet, and, as the weather was continuously fine, this may be considered reasonably accurate. We now had time to look more closely at the mountains around us, and decided on a programme for the next day. The double-headed peak to the west of Mir Samir seemed to offer a climb with reasonable chance of success and an opportunity to acclimatize at a greater height. The rock covering its sides seemed very loose, and there would obviously be a hard slog to gain height, but the summit seemed to promise good views, while a stretch of fairly level ridge connecting the north and south towers appeared to offer a good vantage-point for the surveyor.

We were away at 7 A.M. bound for "the Twins," as we had christened our mountain. Nurnamad announced that he did not feel well and was going back to Kaujan. Fiezela was therefore left to guard the camp, and Nao Ruz came to carry. We took a direct line up to and over the mound which stretched in an unbroken line from one side of the valley to the other at a distance of about a mile from the camp, and found ourselves on a flat terrace where the two streams meandered. The horses had come up here, and were chewing the more luscious grass of the boggy land by the stream. To our surprise, too, there were cows contentedly chewing the cud. We learnt afterwards that these belonged to Kaujan people and came up here for summer pasture. One stream came down directly from Mir Samir, and the other from the western col between "the Twins" and an

<sup>1</sup> Tea.

<sup>2</sup> Sugar.



equally high mountain which we named "the Beak" because of the tower on its summit of that shape.

We began to ascend the slope facing us, but soon decided that a direct ascent from this side was impracticable because of the terribly loose rock, and consequently we veered round to the narrow coomb between the two peaks. There we came upon patches of snow, and, looking across to the opposite slope some 300 feet away, we saw that it was covered with marks resembling the footprints of a large animal. Some would have thought that these were the marks of a yeti; but I have never believed in the existence of these animals, and felt sure that the round patches were caused by the wind chasing snow on a smooth surface. In any case, we saw no other sign of any large animal. We were delighted with the many flowers we found: there were carpets of primula and patches of yellow and purple flowers which, surprisingly, grew to a height of two or more feet. The going was hard as we zigzagged backward and forward up the northern slope, finally coming up on to the ridge. A shoulder of perhaps a quarter of a mile in length composed of solid blocks of black rock interspersed with shale offered a welcome relief from vertical climbing, so that another hour found us on the peak overlooking the camp.

Nao Ruz had proved himself a good route-finder as well as a good carrier and had amazing stamina. He now deposited the theodolite and interested himself in its manipulation. It was he who found the flattest stance and brought pebbles to wedge up the instrument and hold it steady, and he was delighted to be asked to hold the notebook and pencil ready for observations, though nothing of the sort had ever before reached his simple mind. Eleanor had managed to keep up with the party so far in spite of her "split tummy," as she called it, and now had a good rest in the sun, looking out on to the beauty of the surrounding mountains. From this high stance I was able to take photographs of Mir Samir a mile or so away, which were useful afterwards in identifying our high camp and reconnaissance route. We could see three little lakes in a dip between the actual peak and a ridge which stretched for a mile or more in front of the summit, cutting off its lower slopes from our view. This seemed as if it would be an ideal camping site, for, after our experience

on Demavend, we were rather obsessed with the idea of having water near at hand! This fact received emphasis within the next hour, for we had exhausted the water from our small bottle, and up here on this barren slag-heap there was no trickle of water, and we had to descend a thousand feet before we could quench our thirst. Appetites were easily satisfied with chocolate and raisins, but these only in moderation, for they served but to provoke thirst.

We were now able to make a fairly direct descent down to the stream which we could see meandering below. Eleanor had to be very careful because of her hand and was consequently very slow. I wanted to get down again and went on ahead. Nao Ruz, torn between his duty to the two memsahibs, compromised by coming with me for a hundred feet, indicating a flat rock for me to sit on, and then going back to conduct Eleanor.

When the steepest part was safely negotiated and it was only a question of walking down I went on ahead and got back to the camp at 5 P.M. By the time the other two had arrived the billy was boiling, and we had tea before starting to cook the main meal of the day. We particularly enjoyed one of the tins of pineapple which we had brought for just this sort of occasion, when appetite needed to be encouraged. I felt very fit and had a feeling of exultation that we really were on the spot and the prospects for Mir Samir were good: it was obvious that it was a climb we should enjoy even if we did not reach the summit. This mood was helped by the glorious weather we were enjoying. The sun, whose heat was overpowering in the valley, was delightful here, and shone from a cloudless sky. "Further outlook—continuing fine," I seemed to hear!

During our absence the two teenage sons of Nao Ruz had arrived to collect their three cows and drive them down to Kaujan for the winter. They were thin beasts and showed no sign of ever giving milk, but Nao Ruz was extremely proud of them. He slept with his sons in the little two-man tent, and we ourselves were in bed by 6.30 P.M., rather soon after supper by civilized standards, but it seemed to have no ill-effects on us!

The next day was, by agreement, an off day, so Eleanor stayed in bed till 10.30. We enjoyed our 'brunch' of dehydrated pork and stewed fruit, and in the afternoon I had a delightful

siesta under the shade of the big rock while Eleanor collected flowers. I felt that things were improving till Nao Ruz came up to us and, pointing first to his teeth and then down the valley, indicated that he had toothache and must go home. If he left us, I thought, we should have little chance of achieving Mir Samir or even of reaching the shoulder. Fortunately we were able to persuade him to stay, and we were soon making plans for the morrow. We felt that we should begin to establish higher camps, so decided that Fiezela and I should go higher, carrying instruments, some first aid, and as much food as far as possible, returning to camp the same day. I packed my rucksack ready for an early start and retired to the tent to sleep. In the middle of the night I woke in a cold sweat, dreaming that I was sinking into a bottomless pit. For once I found sleep difficult, and was glad to get up as soon as it was light. Nao Ruz was much more cheerful than on the previous evening, and felt that he would be able to stay at the camp. Peppermint toothpaste rubbed on the aching jaw worked miracles, and he so far recovered that he looked for flowers for Eleanor.

I departed, therefore, with the soldier in cheerful mood. He carried the instruments, and I carried my stout Bergen rucksack filled with tins of provisions and first aid. We went along a now familiar path over the mound, up to the terrace, and along the boggy plateau before striking up the shoulder to the east. Fiezela carried well, going ahead in leaps and bounds followed by long rests, while I kept on more slowly and steadily. The increasing altitude—we were now at a height of 14,000 feet—in any case made it impossible for me to hurry had there been any reason to do so. The angle got steeper, and at midday we were on a spur overlooking another high plateau, 500 feet below and on the Mir Samir route, which seemed good for another camp. I wondered whether to leave it at that, for the rucksack was heavy and the midday sun enervating, but Fiezela bounded ahead, so I decided that it would be wise to carry our supplies on to the face of Mir Samir itself, leaving them there for a third camp even higher. I therefore crossed the intervening dip and saw Fiezela high up on the opposite slope, having got there by the ridge connecting the two heights. I signed for him to wait, but saw that instead he deposited his





*Pitching a Tent at Mir Sakanderbeg*

*See page 200.*

*The Panjshir River: Fighting the Currents in a Shallow Stretch*

*See pages 172-173.*







*The Anjuman Pass and Distant View of the Pamirs*

*See page 198.*

load and came bounding down to me. He then took my rucksack and led me back to his dump. What a different man this was from the weak-kneed creature who had left Zenēh some time ago! We made a cache amid some big rocks, and he insisted on screening everything completely from view. I failed to see the need in this lonely spot, but let him have his way. I was to regret it later! He appreciated the raisins I offered him, and when we had had sufficient rest at about two o'clock we set off steadily down again. On the way down we heard the whistle of marmots and were lucky enough to catch sight of one before it darted to cover.

I was certainly tired after the day's strenuous climb, but felt very happy that we had made one more step towards the climb. Back at camp I found Eleanor feeling much better. She had been out collecting flowers, and Nao Ruz had added a number to the growing collection. He, however, still had toothache, and could not be dissuaded from returning to Kaujan to the comfort of his wife and home. He promised to return the following day, though, and we could do nothing more about it. As it grew cold by five o'clock, the thermometer registering 40 degrees Fahrenheit, and going steadily lower, we retired to our tent and did crosswords till it was too cold to keep our hands out of the sleeping-bags, and we finally withdrew entirely into their warmth and slept. During the night Eleanor, always the lighter sleeper, woke me to tell me that cows were round the tent. I endured their nibbling and stamping for a while, but in the end had to get up and chase them away. Although we were awake by five, we did not get up till past six, for the temperature was low and there was a white frost. The sky was overcast and remained so all that day and the next. Eleanor continued to look for flowers; and we were amazed at the variety and size of those we saw in such an arid land, growing not only by the stream but high up on the mountains. We saw, too, flocks of birds resembling terns by the water's edge and some small wading birds which flew away at our approach.

I took the opportunity of trying to improve the second stove in case the little one gave up completely, but could not make much progress without tweezers, which we did not seem to have brought. I was, however, able to transfer the



uprights from this to the other stove, which helped with the precarious balancing of saucepans. We tried other varieties of dehydrated foods and never seemed to suffer from an inadequate diet. We took the precaution of supplementing it with vitamin pills, however. In these food experiments we were assisted by a little flat-tailed mouse which picked up scraps and, after sampling them, carried them away to his family.

In the evening, to our great pleasure, Shamaz Nun arrived, bringing with him very welcome eggs, fresh apricots, and cow's milk in a goat's skin. He at once recited the English words he had been taught and asked for another English lesson. He learnt this time numbers 20-100 and words in connexion with the weather. Poor Fiezela tried hard to compete, and marched about the camp saying, "One, too, tree, fawr, fife," but never got beyond that!

That night and the next morning were again cold, which was not encouraging for the future higher camps. However, we felt we must make use of the presence of another strong man among us, so decided to carry up more supplies. Shamaz Nun, Fiezela, and I between us carried up a biscuit tin of food, a tin of paraffin, a rope, and a box of useful oddments. We deposited them on a site we chose for the second camp and returned to Base in the early afternoon. Eleanor, in the meantime, re-organized the food at Base Camp and collected more flowers; her collection was now steadily growing and, we felt, would be acceptable to botanists if we ever got it back to England in good condition! At dusk Nao Ruz had not returned, so that our plans for the morrow were uncertain. If he were there to carry we would establish a higher camp, but if not we would wait one more day.

When we first woke the temperature was only 10 degrees Fahrenheit, so we stayed in bed until the sun reached us, and then warmed ourselves with coffee and scrambled egg—very good! As a result of a pow-wow with Shamaz Nun we decided to establish the higher camp in spite of the weather. He and the soldier would carry the tent and kitbags to the place we had selected the previous day and then return to Base. He had to go down to Zenēh once more to carry out his duties of Hakim, but promised to return after five more days. Just as we were all

departing Nao Ruz turned up, but we were able to stick to our plans, adding another tent and more food to the packages. All the rest of our belongings were pegged down underneath the plastic sheet, safe, we hoped, from the weather and any marauding animals. Although heavily laden, the men forged on ahead, and by the time we reached our goal the tent was up, in a well-sheltered position in the lee of a big rock. The stream was handy, too, for all our needs, and the route to the summit of Mir Samir clear ahead.

The men would not sleep at this height (14,000 feet), but, having seen us installed, went down again straight away. The chief trouble was that this spot, being well above pasture-level, provided no dung (their staple fuel) with which to make a fire. The spot was desolate enough, the sandy soil being littered with rocks which appeared perhaps to have been cast here by some mighty eruption, yet all around there were flowers. The sun did not sink so early behind the hills up here, and we were able to see till 6.30 P.M.

On Tuesday, September 6, the weather improved, and we found new inspiration in tackling our objective. We did not wait for the men to return, but soon after dawn set off up the mountain-side towards our original dump and on to a ridge from which we could prospect for our third camp. I shouldered the rope, put the steel measuring-tape into my rucksack with woollies and a little sustenance for the way, and we set off. We reached the level of the cache in an hour and decided to pick up the goods and go straight on up, but, alas! half an hour's searching failed to reveal the instruments and food brought up three days before. I had marked the spot in my mind as being in line with a waterfall to the east and about a hundred yards from it, but had unfortunately not made a cairn. We combed the hillside at this level, but could find nothing. As the waterfall had dwindled and was now scarcely existent, I thought we might have come too high, so we descended and made another search. Still no cache—Fiezela had been only too successful! We searched and we searched, but in vain. Eventually we gave up and went higher, leaving the rope and other things under a very prominent rock, on which Eleanor built a cairn. This, looked at from below, had the appearance of a rabbit about to

spring! We felt that this could not be overlooked. Our only hope now was in the truth of the proverb that he who hides can find; the next day we should come with Fiezela and retrieve the lost equipment.

The descent to the camp was easy, and there we found Nao Ruz and the soldier. They agreed to stay the night and come with us to establish a final camp the next day. Feeling that we now were about to embark on the real thing, we went to bed with easy consciences and slept well at 14,000 feet, our brains whirling with excitement at the prospect of the following day.



*Reconnaissance—and Disappointment*

As usual, things did not go as planned, for the morning of September 7. Everything was organized for our departure for the higher camp, when, to our horrified surprise, we found that first Nao Ruz and then the soldier were both preparing to *descend* from our present camp—ultimately to get back to the comparative warmth of Base Camp. This was, of course, an impossible situation. We needed them for carrying; and, more important still, the soldier was our only hope for finding the hidden instruments; the cache of food hardly mattered in comparison.

Joyce tried persuasion. I was collecting a last few flowers for Kew from this site. No, their minds were made up, apparently. By this time, apart from the nuisance of my hand, I was feeling *very* fit; as I had done since the first three days at Base Camp; they were not too strenuous ones, and although I had never felt sick at all, my 'broken-feeling' stomach and my nasty mouth—due to what germ, we never discovered (as likely the extreme heat or an internal chill)—had come back to normal. So now I felt game for any assault, mountain or otherwise, and, seeing that Joyce was having no luck, I suddenly burst in—and *raged*, reiterating, in Farsi, how thoroughly "bad" they were. Then, using perhaps a rather mean stratagem—for since the Zenēh horses episode we had never paid anything in advance again—I shouted, pointing downward, that if they went home, there would be *no afghanis*; and I also threatened the soldier with reports to the Hakim (head of police) at Zenēh, as on other occasions. Sudden shock tactics and this dreadful threat so stunned them that they put down their already rolled-up rugs, changed their minds—and—we all shook hands! Within moments they were offering to share the burden of our loads! Off we went. It was after ten o'clock, but it was a pleasant morning, not too hot.

I was finding carrying things not too comfortable. Nao Ruz

turned round, and, grown observant, noted the situation. A rucksack strap had broken, and I had to use a hand for it (and, of course, had my ice-axe as well). Without a word he took it from me, and I was pleased and grateful, although this was a relatively easy climb.

The flowers at nearly 15,000 feet were lovelier than ever—in particular, the primulas. Every here and there would be a little sandy patch, and it would be a haze of soft cyclamen-pink colour, every little root looking, oddly enough, as if it had been specially planted, with not a weed in between; there must have been something peculiar to these patches, for nothing else grew there.

There was bright sunshine and a cloudless sky, but it was getting colder and there was much ice about—some of it so thin as to be invisible. Joyce had a nasty slip at one point, on a very steep slope, really a long slab (it was very near running water, so the ice was unexpected). It was not very serious, luckily—although she twisted on to her back and jarred it; but it made her already sore hands (for which we had largely our troubles with stoves to blame) still more torn and gory-looking.

Fortunately Joyce enjoys cooking—but the nasty kerosene and resultant soot did not help roughened skin. I, being the 'food organizer,' would do the fetching and carrying, knowing pretty exactly where all the various items—tins, packets, tubes, and utensils—were to be found. There was really remarkably little pilfering by our men. This may have been due more to the fact that they were usually rather suspicious of our food than to innate honesty. There were only certain things which, after cautious sampling, they seemed particularly to fancy—such as the various types of oatmeal biscuits and, by contrast, that sustaining sweetmeat, beloved of all expeditions, Kendal Mint Cake. They all had an inordinate love of sugar; however much we gave them, it would always vanish at a sitting. Perhaps the fact that it came out of five-pound bags gave them the idea that our supplies were endless; probably they had never seen so much at a time in their hand-to-mouth living. Anyhow, we were thankful we had been so generously supplied for the Expedition! Tea also we gave them at all hours of the day—and

night—quite literally; for we would be settled down to sleep, when a head would be put into the tent, and there would be the one word “Chai”; and, for the sake of peace, it had to be found and doled out. But it must in all fairness be admitted that their wants were remarkably few. Their standard of living is so low that it would take a long time to get them out of the conservative ideas that they have had perforce to adopt. Malnutrition is certainly, and obviously, one of the curses of their country. This is particularly sad to see in the little children, with their terribly enlarged stomachs. There seems so little milk to be had that one wonders how they survive at all.

Our soldier duly found the cache under the rock—instruments and food—which he had so safely disguised! It was simple, after that, to collect the more recently hidden things from under the boulder not far away, on which sat the cairn I had built, and which looked like Brer Rabbit himself, beckoning us on!

Once we had surmounted the highest ridge, by afternoon, a most exciting prospect met our gaze. We were now looking *down* upon the little chain of blue-green lakes to our right. From “the Twins,” which we had climbed from Base Camp, we had been little more than level with them, and they had been to our left. Joyce was for pitching our camp near the lakes—chiefly for being sure of water—but I was so thrilled by the view in every direction from where we stood that I begged that we might stay on what I named “the Promontory,” a large spur of rocky land, reasonably flat, and carpeted thickly here and there with yellow flowers we did not recognize, ideal for a camp site for our one small tent—for we knew the men had no intention of staying with us. Having very keen hearing, I said, too, that I knew there was water somewhere just below us to our left. (This proved later to be true; and in any case there was snow.) It seemed a waste of time to descend to the lakes, merely to have to ascend again to-morrow, if we were to attack the peak of Mir Samir rather more frontally, as it now seemed more than just possible to do. Then, too, there was a most convenient gap in the sheltering line of rock to the west behind our “Promontory,” through which we should have the light of the setting sun, till its last rays. Moreover, warmth was rather more to be



ought after now than on our trek up the Panjshir Valley! Joyce also was becoming enamoured of the beauty around, whichever way we looked. The men, too, thought it a good site (it would be nearer to the lower camps for them as well!) So it was agreed by all, and it proved fortunately to be—as things so disastrously turned out—the lesser of two evils!

Every one was in first-rate form. The men were cheerful and helpful. I set off to find the running water I could hear. Sure enough, lying on my face, I could see down between two boulders a quite considerable stream. I moved smaller stones to mark the spot and went to tell Nao Ruz, thinking we could hang down billy-cans or water-carriers for filling our bottles. But he obviously wanted to make things easier for us than that before leaving us. When I took him to the place he showed a strength of which I could never have believed he was the possessor, although he was tall and could carry well. He started hurling boulders of quite vast size and weight in all directions, like some Titan! I was really quite worried for him, feeling that he would injure himself unnecessarily, and I assured him that we could now manage. But no, as we had noticed more than once, when one had really got them on one's side they would go to any lengths to do the thing properly, and perhaps to win one's unqualified approbation and unstinting praise. These he certainly got on this occasion—for we could now approach quite closely to a swift-flowing little river, with his newly made 'rockeries' on both sides, to mark the spot.

We all had chai; the men pitched our tent, and we shook hands and said good-bye—for four or five days, we thought. They had made it plain that it was much too cold for them to stay—and we did not mind their departing. Once they had vanished—the soldier to the nearer camp, Nao Ruz to Base Camp, he said—we had a meal and prepared to turn in early, ready for a reconnaissance of our peak—now so near—when we rose next day. We were really feeling ecstatic!

That night I slept as I had hardly ever slept since we had camped, though, to save weight, we had not brought any mattresses. No hard ground could have kept me awake; it might have been sea-level, not 15,000 feet—but I might not have slept so well had I known that a giant centipede was out-

side the tent! I made his acquaintance as I went out; I had had a passing glimpse of a scorpion on the ascent.

The morning proved to be so lovely that we decided to carry nothing except our ice-axes, not even a camera, but to give ourselves entirely to deciding for the following day on our nearly exact course of action for the final assault, with as far as possible a decision where to have one bivouac before the summit. We had to descend very slightly from our "Promontory," and then we had climbing such as we had hardly expected from our more remote view of the ultimate peak.

There were some really weird rock-formations, and the effects of wind and weathering were even more instantly visible in the extraordinarily jagged 'fences' of ice and snow—rock-like in their hardness, not even amenable to smashing blows with our axes. We had to go round them, or over them: the latter effort was not to be recommended—so astonishingly sharp were the spike-like, tearing points of ice—they could catch one's clothing like barbed wire. Yet here and there were *still* some of the most lovely flowers—particularly, large orange globe flowers and a beautiful kind of 'stone-crop' (the nearest we could get to a name!), a mass of bluish-heliotrope-coloured blossoms on blue-green leaves.

We could follow no direct route to the ridge just above the main glacier below the peak; it was a zigzag course. But, once we were over the final ridge, the glacier presented no special difficulties; it stretched before us at no terrifying angle (such as we were to meet with, in the main chain of the Hindu Kush, later on). Near the foot of the glacier was quite a phenomenon—a small frozen 'lake' of Blue Ice, a perfect semicircle set against rock, and round it a parapet of ice, of even height, as if built by hand. Where the glacier narrowed there was a gap between what looked like a small peak on its own and the main peak of Mir Samir. Towards the south was a short ridge of rock and snow, almost at right angles to the glacier. Here was our route, an eminently suitable climb, up the south-east shoulder, to the right of which was a long rock crack, should the snow prove hard going. Beyond this there seemed to be plenty of sheltering rock where we could bivouac with safety. It was thrilling to think that to-morrow night we should be there to rest.

What was perhaps even more thrilling was to know that no two women had ever been *alone* as we were now, in this isolated bit of Central Asia. One German woman had been with her husband and two other men to the summit. But a party of four, and with fellow-countrymen to take all responsibility, suggests less complete isolation than we might have felt—but somehow never did. I sometimes wondered *which* was the stranger position: when the two of us spent nights together, entirely alone in the wilds, as we had done now, on more than one occasion; or when our wild-looking tribesmen were with us, outnumbering us two to one? They *could* have been treacherous. I can honestly say I never had a single fear, either way (though the men must have known we had money with us: in fact, we had a very great deal—much too many afghanis).

We began the descent, probably from about 16,500 feet, well content with our reconnaissance. True, some hail fell as we were nearing our camp site, but the sky was cloudless. Then To-morrow would be *the* day—the goal of our venturing—although if we did not reach the summit—even now the long journey had been more than worth while, to this unique position. We were full of hope, physically fit, and everything seemed ‘set to fair,’ for the result we wanted. But—it was not to be.

I had slept, seemingly for some time, when I awoke very suddenly. It was still dark—but—was our tent going to blow away? Wind and rain—or was it snow?—seemed to be pounding it remorselessly. What was happening? I could not believe my ears. Joyce was still sleeping soundly, but I felt I had better wake her, get some idea of the time and what was taking place. It was about 3.30 A.M.—and when we raised the tent flap it seemed as if we were already nearly snowed in; there was nothing for it but to wait till light, and make decisions then.

We never slept any more, and when daylight came to our shuddering tent one look was all that was necessary. As far as our vision was concerned MIR SAMIR WAS NOT THERE. Yes, visually the magnificent peak that had beckoned us from England did not exist, and the same applied wherever we looked; the peaks we had named—“the Haystack,” “the Twins,” “the Beak”—had all vanished, as though before that



they had been a mirage, a fantasy; peaks of the main Hindu Kush range, to the north, had become equally non-existent. We could have been in the middle of a plain.

The change was so vast and overpowering, there could at first be no sense of disappointment—only of complete incredulity. I suddenly remembered the date—September 9, 1960. Exactly to the day, almost to the hour, twenty years before, on September 9, 1940, I had stood in Baker Street, in London's West End, before seven in the morning, surveying the results of the very first penetration of German raiders and their bombs to the heart of that West End. I had on previous days seen the glare of their fires in Dockland: that was understandable. This around me, this first time, was unbelievable—gutted dress-shops, grocery-shops, everyday things from them scattered on pavements, in gutters. I had exactly the same feeling of *incredulity* then as now.

My mind seemed to clear. The older incident was due to the stupidity and wickedness of man; this 'anniversary' of it for me was a so-called 'act of God'—and that gave me a transitory feeling of *horror*—*not* for what was happening, but for what *might* have happened. Suppose we had made our final assault *one day earlier*—we should not, in all probability, be telling our story at this moment. We had plenty of reason for gratitude, not for bitter repining. Mountaineering is nothing if not a school for philosophers. It is necessary to view things dispassionately if one can. I thought of mountaineers who had been more *involved* in such an appallingly sudden change, and who had never come back; swept to their deaths, they had perhaps become more 'famous' by dying. We could still view this change objectively; we were almost 'outside it.'

Our later reactions were perhaps odd. We made no plans—we sat back, trying to keep warm in our little tent, while the blizzard raged outside, and did crossword puzzles, from the 7th *Daily Telegraph* book. Even now I do not quite know what would have happened (for we were not as much 'outside it' as we thought) if, in a few hours' time, suddenly our tent flap had not been opened up. Our soldier's face appeared—and behind him was Nao Ruz.

This was a triumph: they had really troubled enough about

us to come up in these conditions! They lost no time in making it very clear that we were in considerable danger. The weather would not improve, but the reverse; we should be swept away, tent and all. This really roused us thoroughly. The two men worked at top speed. We packed all we could dig out of the snow; but in my life I have never left such an untidy camp site; and I am equally sure Joyce has not done so either. I am certain *many* things will come to light some day when some other explorer finds our Elysium of a "Promontory," and, in the hot sun, the snow has gone.

Getting down to the lower camp was indeed a nasty business, though we faced mere unpleasantness with a will, thinking what *could* have been our fate. But then, by the perversity of things, the driving snow grew less; and then, too, try as one would to prevent it, the sadness of disappointment *would* creep in. But it was an honourable defeat—not due to bad planning nor stupidity in action. But *we* were not 'finished.' There were other worlds to conquer. We knew that the German team from Nürnberg had found it a difficult peak, more so than peaks, including Annapurna IV, they had climbed in the Himalayas. But conditions for us had seemed ideal. The fact that our reconnaissance climb had given us such infinite hope of full success for the last three thousand feet or so of Mir Samir's 19,882 feet, made this complete 'veto' the more frustrating.

Weeks afterwards, however, I realized that we had learnt far more about Afghanistan and its people, and had some of the thrills of our lives, subsequently to our disrupted plans in the Panjshir. We certainly were to turn our defeat in one direction into victory in another, even in the face of further difficulties, not climatic this time, but ones manufactured by our men, and others!

As we got near to the lower camp we were startled by many avalanches of the rotten rock all round us. This certainly confirmed very surely the men's assertion that things were not going to get better—even though the actual blizzard had abated. Joyce was for trying to make the whole journey down to Base Camp, but I felt that, having suffered before through attempting too much on an empty stomach, it would be wiser to stay at the second camp, to rest and eat; for, in our exces-

sively hasty departure from "the Promontory," we had eaten only what we could snatch up and pocket.

This proved quite a good idea. We had a really good meal, which was very welcome. Then the men took as much as they could manage down to Base Camp, and we had another night alone, in the big tent now. I was kept awake by further avalanches, but the snow and wind grew less—although, when we got up in the morning, there was much fresh snow all round. Even so, I managed to gather some of the plentiful wild onions growing near.

We had asked the men to return next morning to carry down the remainder of our baggage, "about ten o'clock," and they had nodded at our Farsi numeral and ten fingers! After they had departed I reminded Joyce that none of our men had owned a watch! They returned at 9.45 A.M.—a pretty good calculation by the sun, which had shown itself a little; and Mir Samir was faintly visible, but it would be many days before there was the faintest possibility of any further attempt on the peak—if ever, that year. I said to Joyce, "Let's get to the Anjuman Pass!" and from that idea I never once swerved.



*New Prospects Open*

WHEN the porters had left us Eleanor and I had made ourselves as comfortable as possible in the rather dismal circumstances, both physical and mental. We had good appetites now and could eat anything, but the howling wind made outdoor cooking difficult. We did manage to heat up some soup, but for the rest we were content with cold fare—corned beef, biscuits, and pineapple—eating the meal in the comparatively cosy interior of the tent. We looked out on to a dismal scene: the camp site had been rather dreary even when the weather was good, but now, with snow falling and the wind raging, it seemed even more unattractive. After a time we took no more notice of the continuous noise of falling debris, but when the screeching of the wind was followed by a tearing, crashing roar we looked up to see rocks being torn out and hurled down the slope, coming to rest in the gully that separated us from the peak. We were thankful our little tent was not perched up there among the loose boulders, and felt we had been right in coming down, disappointing though it was.

Everything made for dejection, cut off as we were from all human contacts, and as I went over the various steps in my mind I wondered if we could have done more to achieve this first objective.

The first factor had been the weather: this we could not control, but perhaps we should have tried to wait at 15,000 feet until the weather had improved? In fact, I think, perhaps, had it not been for the arrival of Nao Ruz and his insistence that we were in danger, we should have tried to stay, at any rate a little longer, to see if conditions improved. The climb had necessitated a bivouac after leaving the tent, and good weather was essential for this, if we were not to die of exposure, sleeping out on snow at 17,500 feet. We could not have waited more than two days, because we had not sufficient food.

The second factor had been the unreliability of the porters;

about this we could have done nothing, even if we had been a bigger party. They would not have carried any higher, or slept above 14,000 feet; nor could we have recruited a greater number. A party tackling Mir Samir must to a large extent carry for themselves, but, of course, we could not have known this without seeing conditions on the spot.

The last controlling factor had been that we were only a party of two. If we had been four, as originally planned, we could have got more food up to 15,000 feet (and so just possibly have been able to 'ride out the weather,' for a time). It is true there would have been more to eat it, but with two more carriers we could have gone up two or three times, perhaps assembling a supply of food for ten days, instead of only five. Again, two might have made the attempt, supported by two at the last camp or at the final bivouac. We two had had no support nor reinforcements behind us.

Taking everything, therefore, into consideration, we felt that we had come to the only decision. We had wondered whether we should wait to see what the weather would do; but we knew that the porters would not stay with us any longer, but would insist on returning to Kaujan. We were not a strong enough party to carry up tent and provisions for ourselves with any hope of successful climbing afterwards. We decided, therefore, to force a way up to the Anjuman Pass, from which we might hope to have at least a glimpse of the prohibited Pamirs.

At 4.30 P.M. we had settled in for the night, for the temperature in the tent was down to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, and we were surrounded by a cold, clinging mist which now and again thickened into driving snow. Mir Samir was invisible, and down the valley only a few snow-sprinkled peaks stood up above the line of cloud.

The continuous fall of light snow during the night had prepared us for the white landscape of the morning. We took one or two photographs of the changed scene and then prepared to go down. Nao Ruz and Fiezela shouldered the tent and kit-bags, and we picked up bulging rucksacks and set off down to Base Camp. It took only a couple of hours to make the return, in spite of the fact that the rocks were slippery and we had to put one foot in front of another very carefully. At one moment

I had my boot wedged in a crack between two rocks, and Fiezela came back out of his way to help me free it. He had certainly improved since his first days of mountaineering! For the most part the sky was leaden, but at times a fitful sun broke through, transforming the grim surroundings into a fairyland of sparkling frost and snow.

Base Camp seemed unfamiliar, so bleak and cold was it, and we were happy to stay inside the tent for the rest of the day. This gave Eleanor an opportunity of arranging the flowers she had collected at a greater height, and me the occasion of getting my diary up to date. I emerged from the tent only to make a hot drink and quickly returned to its comfort; by five o'clock we were in our sleeping-bags ready for the night's sleep, which would not come. I suppose we had much on our minds, and when I did at last fall asleep the howling wind outside became in my dreams a mob of animals rushing at me. This illusion was heightened by the fact that the cows outside rushed up and down perpetually instead of settling down to sleep as they usually did after dark. We presumed they must be cold like us and were trying to get warm. Nao Ruz apparently had the same idea, for he went out and fastened a rug over the smallest cow, tying it on with twine. He and the soldier, sheltering in the stone compound around a dung fire, sang songs half the night to keep themselves cheerful.

We saw the dawn creep up, but waited till the sun had taken off the edge of discomfort before getting out to cook porridge and make coffee. Nao Ruz came to explain that he must go down to Kaujan to warn the men to come up for the horses, but he promised to return the following day. We filled in the day taking photographs, re-sorting our personal equipment, and checking the remaining stores. The day passed pleasantly, and we were preparing for bed once more when Shamaz Nun appeared, telling us that he had met Nao Ruz half-way down the path to Kaujan and we might expect the horsemen the following day. In fact they arrived at 5 A.M., full of good spirits, shouting and singing. They captured the horses and showed off their horsemanship to us, careering round and round the camp. Then they all sat round in a circle, one beating a rhythm on an empty oil-drum and the rest singing songs, which



Eleanor recorded on the tape-recorder, which had been brought for this very purpose. They all seemed very pleased with life, and their infectious gaiety made us feel anxious to make a start for Kaujan and embark on the next adventure.

An hour later the horses were loaded and the cavalcade set off down the mountain-side—two women, four horsemen, Nurnamad's horse, Shamaz Nun, Nao Ruz, and Fiezela, the latter being allotted the task of guiding the Kaujan cows down to their winter quarters. We looked forward to seeing the lake by which we had camped on the way up, but, to our astonishment, there was now not a drop of water in it, and we were able to walk dry shod straight across its bed. We could only suppose the cause lay in the freezing of the streams above, although we picked up a stream again on the lower side. We were again interested in the curious formation of the khaki-coloured rocks overlayed with a hard black veneer and picked out once more the sandstone 'fort' and 'turrets.' From time to time marmots whistled at us in derision, and small black-and-white birds flew up from under our feet or dived into the stream for food. The kuchis had all vanished.

It took little more than an hour to get down to the steep gorge we had toiled up nearly three weeks before; but beyond it we were glad to see again the terraced fields of Kaujan. With whoops of joy the men rushed ahead, and by the time we had reached the Panjshir others were at the bridge ready to unload the horses, and women were peeping out from doors and from behind walls to watch our arrival.

We were taken to the same terrace on which we had slept during our previous sojourn, and the men put up the tent, for the nights were cold even down here, although the sun kept us warm enough during the day. All the men and boys from the village, perhaps twenty in all, came up and sat on the parapet around our square of earth and watched every movement in silence. We paid Nao Ruz the agreed thirty afghanis (5s.) a day, adding a little extra, for he had been a good carrier and the most faithful of our followers. He asked for tins as bak-sheesh, but we could not part with many of these as yet, as we needed them to carry stores for our next journey and could only promise a petrol-tin on our return from the Anjuman!

We spent a comfortable, uneventful night, and on wakening the next morning found that the soldier had slept at the entrance to our tent. Presumably the return to civilization had put him in mind of his duty to protect us! The villagers began to assemble at an early hour, and Eleanor was kept busy attending to filthy sores and weak eyes. The first injunction was usually "Go and wash in the river, and come back."

When Shamaz Nun arrived we were able to negotiate the payment of past services and the recruitment of new porters for the journey of the next few days. The four horsemen who had been with us up to Mir Samir asked to be paid, but we explained to Shamaz Nun that we had given 600 afghanis to the headman at Zenēh for these services. The men, of course, greeted this with scorn, saying that *they* had seen nothing of the money and probably never would. After talking for over an hour we finally agreed to give Shamaz Nun 600 afghanis in return for a receipt, so that we could reclaim the money from Karimboula at Zenēh. It was very difficult to persuade him to put his name to a simple receipt, for he wanted to write a long story with it, and, as this would be in Farsi, we should be unable to decipher what story he had told! He eventually wrote two receipts, one long and one short; Eleanor seized and tore up the longer one, and then handed over the money in notes of small denomination so that he could give each of the four men his due, but, after calling them up, to our dismay, he gave the first man only 50 afghanis. At our protest he smilingly shrugged his shoulders, so, taking him by surprise, she took all the notes back again which he had in his open hand, and distributed them to the men, 150 afghanis to each. They went away, beaming all over their faces. Shamaz Nun, the diplomat, disguised any annoyance he may have felt and continued the negotiations.

We now asked for men to come with horses to carry our things up to the Anjuman Pass. The word 'Anjuman' produced a horrified silence, and no one would volunteer: we could not understand this at the time, but later the meaning became clear. They told us that the four Germans had had to turn back from the Pass. We consulted Shamaz Nun as to what we should offer, and he suggested 500 afghanis per horseman for a trip of about ten days.

Bargaining with them all, we offered 300 afghanis, and at the end of another hour we had four men, at 400 afghanis apiece. We agreed to give them tea and sugar, and they would bring their own flour.

The volunteers were the handsome Abdur Rahman, curly-haired and bearded; Bordashec (whose son was the youngest of the original four horsemen), whom we were to nickname "the Pessimist"; Kholodot, of the original four, the proud owner of a fine grey horse; and Malashum (to prove the strong young man who always supported us when others sought to deter us from the chosen path). Our knowledge of Farsi had now become so extended that we were able to hold conversations with them, helped out by signs and drawings. They were anxious to know something of the country from which we had come. We drew a rough outline and, pointing to the water in the stream, intimated that it was a small island and that it was adjacent to the continent of Europe. For some reason they had heard about Italy and Germany, and we were able to place the relative positions for them. They then pointed to the cows and said, "Gow, England?" in questioning tones, and we tried to tell them how much better and fatter our cows were than theirs, and the large quantity of milk they gave. We also told them that the land in England was flat, with much green pasture and, pointing up to the high mountains, shook our heads. They asked if we ate "gandum," for they only saw us eat biscuits, and thought bread must be unknown in our country. Our store of sugar was always a marvel to them and marked us out as rich people, and they appreciated our tea too to the full. They had little knowledge of Kabul and the rest of their country except what they had heard from the kuchis, while any articles they possessed other than the material they wove in the village were probably obtained from these wandering traders.

On the conclusion of our negotiations the day was still young, and we were able to get packed and off shortly after midday. We bade farewell to the soldier, whose duties ended here, and, after all our adventures with him, he seemed really quite sorry to leave us. Shamaz Nun came with us to the confines of the village and, before departure, took us on one side and wrote down a figure on a piece of paper and said "Pay men



dree sad" (300). Was he a rogue? Or was he just protecting us? Perhaps he hoped for the balance himself!

At the turn of the path we stopped to wave to the figure standing alone, against a background of rude hovels, typical of the Afghan village of to-day. How long will it withstand the march of civilization?

*“At the Peril of your Lives” : to the Outpost*

IT had been hard enough to get any agreement to our determined plan to get to the Anjuman Pass. We had certainly had plenty of difficulties put in our way, and arguments with which to contend, and we had been told of the many discomforts, including the extreme cold, which had apparently defeated our four young friends from Berlin; for they had, we were told, returned to Kaujan and gone elsewhere. However, we had made up our minds and were not to be dissuaded from the attempt to reach it. But it was not until we got to the little hamlet of Mir Sakanderbeg that we were to discover that what they were quite genuinely fearing was the risk to our very lives. At that point it suddenly seemed not so much that they were trying to reason with us as that they were absolutely refusing to allow us to proceed farther.

It appeared that there were raids carried out by tribesmen from over the surrounding mountains, with grim results, of which we were to hear more and more. This had not been mentioned at all, strangely enough, in all the fuss at Kaujan, after which we had set off in the opposite direction to that we had travelled to and from Mir Samir. Even in retrospect it is difficult to say which was the lovelier route, at least in the earlier stages. There was probably more of the human element temporarily as we travelled now, for there were small groups of dwellings, primitive by any standards; and there were kuchi encampments varying in size considerably. The kuchi is, of course, one of the greatest problems of Afghanistan. They hold considerable wealth in their large herds, and even in their womenfolk's jewellery, but they pay no taxes and contribute nothing in labour to the good of the country, as they move from place to place.

The river, or this arm of it, was ever lovely, though often not so wide now, which was just as well, considering the times we had to traverse it by not very orthodox means. One of the

craziest bridges to be crossed was composed of three slim tree-trunks, hardly more than saplings, laid parallel and not particularly close together, with no cross-pieces and nothing to bind them together—just poised precariously between two piles of stones on opposite sides of the water. A very wild wind was blowing as we reached this; and it was noteworthy that our men themselves did not wish us to attempt a crossing, except one at a time, and with one of them leading. At any moment the fragile erection could have blown down, or we could just as easily have been blown off it into the turbulent waters below.

There was a good deal of well-cultivated land. When one thought of most of the land for nearly 400 miles between Herat and Kandahar, little more than an arid desert except where the Helmand river flowed, the need for carrying out the irrigation schemes which would equalize food-supply was borne in on one. Here in this more fertile valley there were many flocks too, and camels.

The full-grown camel usually has such an uneven, shaggy, and untidy 'coat,' due largely to the wear and tear of the great loads he carries, and he too often presents such a generally moth-eaten appearance, that it is sometimes difficult to believe that he gives us finally the wonderful cloth which people are willing to pay so much to have. But when one touches the 'woolly' back of a baby camel that has not yet borne the burdens he will all too soon have thrust upon him, it is then that one realizes that there is nothing quite like the feel of the coat with which nature has clothed him. The softest wool of a lamb, the silkiest hair of a goat, the fur of most animals, wild or domestic—each and all are different from the much sought-after camel-hair.

One of our men pointed out, for our benefit, a *very* young member of the species, with none of his elders anywhere in sight, lying resting in a field through which we passed. Unlike most of the babies, which are, more often than not, almost a creamy white or a very pale coffee-colour, this little one was so dark that his back looked almost black. He obligingly allowed us to stroke him and 'tousle' him! As I buried my fingers in his deep coat it struck me that if I had been blindfolded for this action, before seeing him, I should have wondered whether I



was touching wool or silk; and the warmth radiated by those satin-soft ‘hairs,’ was truly astonishing. It may seem odd that in a hot country or the heat of the desert Mother Nature has so perversely endowed him with this seemingly too cosy covering. But it has also to be remembered that the nights in such surroundings are often bitterly cold. During the day we may perhaps hope that this covering acts to some extent as a shock-absorber for what man puts upon him. From any discomfort that his warm ‘hair’ might cause the camel, man anyhow finally benefits—as usually he does, from the animal creation. The texture is perhaps nearest to that undercoat (from which the long, coarse hairs have all been removed after his death) of an animal that could hardly be more different, whose little jacket is so coveted by rapacious man—or, more particularly, rapacious woman—the beaver. Luckily, unlike the diminutive ‘dam-builder,’ the ‘ship of the desert’ does not need to have an end put to his existence if one wishes to wear a camel-hair coat.

We had kept going without stops since our belated departure from Kaujan, delayed from 8.30 A.M. to 12.15 P.M. by arguments; and the afternoon wore on. But eventually I saw an unusual-looking house—for Afghanistan—and called out to Joyce, “That looks like a Swiss house!” It was built mostly of wood, with a small veranda or two, and with fretted wood-carving. It was set on something of a hill, which made it look more imposing from a distance. This proved to be the goal for which our men had been making, our resting-place for the night. It was ideal, in its way, for there was a flat strip of land below the house, sheltered by a hedge with many wild roses (quite unlike those of our British countryside—fuller and redder). Below this again was a long, steep dip to the rushing river. But there was no need to descend to this for water. At right angles to our ‘strip,’ where the men helped us to pitch both our tents, was a lovely little tumbling stream, with here and there a tiny fall, which ran down to meet the river.

From our long, flat ‘terrace’ camp site we had a completely new view of Mir Samir from the other side, not really very far away from here, although it was several days’ trek from our last sight of it from another angle. Perhaps it was fortunate that it now occasioned remarkably few really mournful regrets, for

this reverse picture of the peak was *not* particularly inspiring. We were now seeing it, not looking isolated and majestic and immense in its loneliness, but with comparatively little snow on this face, reduced in size, to the eye, by its proximity to the greater peaks of Nuristan—even partial ascent of which, in any case, sad to say, had been denied to us, not by weather conditions or difficulty, but by ‘Government intervention.’ It was more than a little disappointing to think that permission, granted earlier by Afghanistan in London, had been rescinded in Kabul; and reasons could only be guessed at, not ascertained.

Not long before we had arrived at Mir Sakanderbeg we had passed a number of fields in which peasants were working hard, collecting bundles of peas, waiting there to be carried away. They smiled always to us in friendly fashion, and we had picked off a pod or two to try them. They were all small, short, but very full pods, the contents being the finest possible, sweet-tasting *petits pois*. A man and his little son proffered bundles, which we very readily accepted. Again I was at the end of the caravan, and as we were about to leave the final fields behind us another peasant pointed to his bundles and to me, obviously wishing me to have one of his too! Nothing loath, I took it, with many expressions of gratitude, under my other arm, well and truly loaded now. Rather amusingly, I had not gone many steps, when I found myself being dragged backward very strongly indeed. Nearly falling over, and thinking the man had decided I had helped myself to too much, I managed to turn round—to find that one of our horses had got behind me, and, obviously envious, had got the whole large bundle, except for a few straggling branches still under my arm—in his mouth, crunching happily. Another tug of war ensued, in which I won, but gave him a share as a consolation prize.

Joyce now busied herself with the refractory stove, as usual, while I set to work on the peas, the thought of a really fresh vegetable, *not* out of a tin or packet (good though those may be), spurring me on in my task. I was pleasantly surprised when Malashum, the youngest and most stalwart of our horse-men, came and sat down beside me and began to strip all the pods from their branches, ready for me to shell them. A most thoughtful kindness which saved much time and rough work

for one's hands. We were finally able quite to 'gorge' young peas and butter—a real treat!

We slept well—which was perhaps a little surprising—for one could hardly call the hours before we settled down exactly restful or reassuring. We had barely arrived when the bearded headman came to greet us with warmth and interest in our journeyings; but the moment he realized we were making for the Anjuman Pass he seemed to fly into a state of wild alarm, apparently *refusing* to allow us to proceed farther. Though I did not see how he could stop us, it was all going to be much simpler if he were co-operative. He next made it very plain by his actions that we could very easily come to an untimely end—by drawing his fingers across his throat, thus intimating to us the manner of our approaching death if we were foolish enough not to take his advice. We felt at first, anyhow, that perhaps he was overdoing things, as Shamaz Nun had not been quite so alarmist in his arguments against our project. But our own men seemed to be getting infected with fear—although nothing of all this had been mentioned before by them. I returned to my financial bargaining, as it had worked so well before, and said, “No Anjuman, no afghanis,” but Joyce thought, this time, I had better desist from that argument, in case there was very real danger and they came solely through greed of gain; later we both were very glad of this same argument—and it worked, too. In the present state of things they had perhaps (fortunately) scarcely noticed my one ejaculation about cash, for there was such a hubbub, with half, or probably the whole of, the village around these two phenomenal females.

Two of the men were obviously so impressed, or startled, by our dogged determination to keep to our plans at all costs—even to the cost of life itself, they seemed to think—that there was a complete *volte-face*, and they were all for *our* view, and against the headman for being obstructionist! The other two soon came round to the majority view in the expedition! Of course the headman might still live to have the last laugh (if he happened to have such a macabre sense of humour). But I had a quite extraordinary feeling that, although the risk was indeed genuine, we were simply *bound* to get through all right—as though it had been almost fore-ordained that we should survive



everything: having been disappointed in one thing, we were to do this instead.

We had a wonderful, morning, 'all-over' wash in our lovely falling stream. I had been waked up by what I thought to be a clucking hen, or a number of these fowls, and this extraordinary noise went on without intermission. When I went out to investigate I found that all this high-pitched cackle came from one small woman standing by our little torrent! She was apparently (in her own tongue) telling her 'man' in a field below exactly what she thought of him, for some reason or other! I watched to see what would happen, if anything did. How she had any breath left I shall never know, but she continued, non-stop, until a big man came slowly up from the valley and followed her (still screaming at him) sheepishly into some 'house' (apparently their little stone habitation). The unemancipated woman of the East may be still kept in the background; obviously at times she has her say, and is 'master' of the whole situation.

As on the previous evening, many pathetic cases of suffering were brought for us to see. I had done all I could (while Joyce had been doing the cooking) for skin troubles, aching joints, stomach-aches, and headaches; and now again it was the same, while Joyce had a final argument with the headman. (All our own men needed no further persuading: they were now keen to be off!) He wished her, we gathered, to sign a paper stating that he was not responsible! She did this, and the atmosphere cleared; but she wrote the paper herself (with no mention of throat-cutting, as there may well have been on his), just saying where we intended to go.

There seemed to be an unusually large number of children for the size of the community, some healthy-looking, many diseased in various ways, poor little souls, but they *all* learned to like our boiled sweets. It was obvious that they had never seen anything like them before, and had no idea how to cope with "Cellophane" wrappings; and I had to keep demonstrating from our fortunately large supplies that these round, brightly coloured objects were edible, once the coverings were removed. I think these little Afghans developed quite an affection for us, as well as for our provisions; and, of course,

we *hoped* to have a return journey, when we should see them again!

I must confess that if I had been very seriously depressed by the grim prophecy we had had from the Mir Sakanderbeg ‘oracle,’ my fears would have been more than doubled by my final exit from all that could be called a village. I had grown to like being at the end of the caravan. (Joyce usually preferred the vanguard.) With our “four horsemen of the Apocalypse,” as I named them, this was not such a necessity as with the donkey-men; for on the whole, these men, anyhow, treated their steeds reasonably well. A horse represents wealth in the Hindu Kush, and is therefore to be preserved in reasonable condition, though this is by no means always so, whereas a donkey does not seem to confer any social distinction upon its owner, and no one cares about its fate apparently, although such a necessarily integral part of their very existence in certain terrain. As I therefore followed the last horse into the open country between the mountains I passed five old men, bearded, robed, and turbaned as usual, sitting on a low wall. We had the habit of greeting *every one* we passed, everywhere, often stopping to have a word, shaking hands, and so on. It certainly gave pleasure, and we were never rebuffed. So on this occasion I turned with a broad smile, and waved cheerily to them, trying to take them all in, in the gesture. With no answering smile, *as one man* they solemnly drew their right-hand index fingers across their throats: it might have been rehearsed, so amazingly was the action synchronized. There was no answer to this, just then, but my instinctive reaction was to think, “We’ll be back, to show them they’re wrong”: my ice-axe could be as lethal as a tribesman’s knife. (The tribesman, of course, has probably had more practice with his weapon!)

It was by now after ten o’clock and getting hot gradually, a mere 80 degrees so far—but there was always the river, and it is not just imagination that one is cooler near water. Certainly, with the Panjshir, the wildness of the rushing waters often caused quite an appreciable breeze if one was lucky enough to be close to the margin. It was still wonderful land—fertile, but there was no shade, until at last we came to a veritable oasis, where we halted. We had had a good track for the horses, and

the land was gradually rising. We had crossed the river once on a more reasonable kind of 'bridge'—the tree-trunks were stouter and they were lashed together with branches—and we had regarded, in safety, the rough water below, but my 'accident-prone' person, avoiding one trouble, had soon run into another. In the tiny village beyond the bridge (a kind of extension of Mir Sakanderbeg), on a very steep 'path' between the houses, I was so busy trying to take in all I saw—a smiling woman, a very beautiful girl, two lovely kittens playing together, a horse being shod, just daily life—that I stumbled on some sort of step, placed to ease the gradient, I suppose, and bent back the middle finger of my already fractured right hand. (This was ultimately to cause me more trouble than all the five breaks.)

So, made more weary by pain again, I do not think rest was ever sweeter than in this 'oasis,' almost like a miniature jungle, with some strange trees and shrubs but with many things, as always, we found common to our own country (hemlock, ground-elder, and suchlike). Joyce and I lay in the thick undergrowth, under a tall shady tree we did not know by name, gazing up, as a tiny yellow bird chirped to us and hopped from branch to branch. It was pure heaven; and we only interrupted the silence and tranquillity periodically to munch a piece of Kendal Mint Cake, which never tasted better! Half an hour of such repose seemed to put new life into us.

After this the scenery grew wilder, and there were no more human dwellings for a long time to come. By afternoon the river had to be crossed again, for by now we were locked in by mountains, sometimes sheer down to the water; and it was a question of which side had any track for the horses. There was no bridge at all, but this was apparently a place often forded. Three of the four horses were pushed off, and staggered and stumbled their way across. Then Malashum, our youngest horseman, "the stalwart" as I had nicknamed him, made it clear that we must cross on his back. He girded up all his clothes, and I watched him take Joyce first. The weight of a human burden did not seem to mean much to him, and the turbulent water came up only to about his thighs, but I could see that the current must indeed be very strong; he had a staff,



and he seemed to have to fight every step! To cross, and then to recross to fetch me, took some time; and then it was my turn. It certainly was no easy matter for him to keep his feet: it was little wonder that there had been no suggestion that Joyce and I should wade the river here; we should have been swept downstream at once. One man, Kholodot, alone rode across the river sitting on the top of the horse's pack. He and his grey horse subsequently proved to be as one!

A man on horseback and a youth standing beside him had been watching us from a little semicircle of very green grass which gave place to stony ground before the rugged mountains behind that. He was another spectacular figure—but *not* a prepossessing one.

He appeared to be a man of some standing and substance, judging by his dress and worldly possessions. He leapt off his fine horse as we all finally assembled on the turf. His face was hard and rather cruel-looking, though he was quite young, with no beard; and he certainly had a variety of weapons—whether for attack or defence it was hardly possible to judge. He carried a very new-looking gun; he pulled out an evil-looking knife like a stiletto, with a handle of fine workmanship; and hanging at his side was a whip which, odd though it may seem, looked to me the most sinister object of the lot. The fact that he wore it so did not suggest its immediate use as a horse-whip. We had seen one of the soldiers from Zenēh—not a horseman—who had been at Kaujan to greet us again on our return from Mir Samir, carrying what I had then remarked to Joyce was a particularly nasty-looking whip with a couple of short, sinuous, hard leather thongs (probably to enforce law or punish its breach). But this man's whip (dreadful to admit) immediately suggested something European to me: a concentration camp. It was certainly wonderful craftsmanship that had fashioned it. It was 'woven' of innumerable strands of leather, black, hard as iron, to judge by the rigidity of the thick handle; yet all this was graduated down to an infinitesimally small point, and the lower part moved about like some loathsome black serpent, as its owner moved: one blow of that could have cut inches deep into flesh. The saddle on his mount was the first *real* one I had noticed anywhere; riders just sat astride the pack-saddles of

their horses; and these were made of any odd pieces of old cloth, or straw, or suchlike, and in very poor condition; sometimes there would be a woven blanket over everything. But this elegant riding saddle was of strange pattern which we were to see elsewhere; the dark brown leather was in perfect condition and highly polished; and the handle-like pommel was finely inlaid with ivory. In addition, the animal was gaily caparisoned with velvet and embroidered trappings.

The rider seemed to fly into an absolute passion when our men had apparently informed him of our objective. Our first thought was that he might be the sort of man whom we had been warned to fear as a potential killer. He defied us to stay even in this part of the valley, let alone proceed farther; and positively demanded that we return to Mir Sakanderbeg with him. We argued coolly enough by means of a few words and plenty of dumb show; and now we had the inestimable advantage of having all our men on our side. The younger fellow with this new rider appeared to be supporting all his chief said. For once the thought of the devil we did not know (and might never meet) seemed preferable to the one we did, in the guise of this man now facing us. Although we found later that he was some sort of 'askār' or patrol, he engendered no confidence whatsoever. I felt I would not trust him an inch: the unknown raiders of the mountains could hardly have put more 'fear' into us. We gathered, anyhow, that he was using threats against us, and eventually there was a fierce argument with our men, and a really nasty moment when Malashum, our young "stalwart," sprang on the awkward stranger. The former was by far the bigger man, but the other had the gun, and he pulled out his knife again. Both seemed to think better of it, and the incipient fight was mercifully averted. The stranger, whom our men described as "very bad," luckily decided to leave us to our fate, leaped on his horse, forded the river, with his companion also astride, and was gone. We breathed more freely. (He also had tried to get some written statement from us, but failed!)

At about 2.30 in the afternoon we came to a most lovely piece of rising ground above a rushing torrent. Unlike our Demavend adventure, on our Hindu Kush treks we were hardly ever out of the sight or sound of water; and near many villages there

were primitive but very lovely little water-mills, housed usually in little flat round buildings composed of loose stones, with a raised aqueduct running from each. At this high ground we halted and pitched our tents, as there was, rather below us, a tiny village, called Chalzur, and the men might therefore procure flour for themselves.

We soon had many visitors. Joyce began to wrestle with the stove and some cooking; there was quite a wind, which did not help. We still had some of our lovely peas left, which kept me busy; and a boy, seeing our efforts, very kindly brought us chai in a large copper cooking-pot, and took our peas off to cook for us! Women, friendly and smiling, little girls too, soon joined us, quite content to sit and stare!

At one point it looked as if we might have to get off this lovely ‘headland,’ like a meadow, bounded below by the river and above by a field of grain. An old man on horseback arrived. He had gentle blue eyes and delicate features; but he seemed in a rather perturbed state about something or other. He appeared to be the owner of the land, and held a parley with our men; it seemed to be something to do with his cattle and our horses—the latter I had observed having a munch or two of his crops before they were tethered—or possibly he felt also that we had perhaps driven off his cattle, which certainly did retire elsewhere, quite voluntarily, on our arrival; or, indeed, it may well have been that he too was nervous for our safety, for he gesticulated in our direction—and did not want the responsibility of our possible fate! Anyhow, the agreement arrived at was that we could stay that night, provided we moved off next day—which we had intended to do, anyway. Apparently his eyes were giving him trouble; my bathing them for him chased away any doubts he might have had about our good faith!

Joyce and I had the smaller tent and gave the larger one to the men, although so often they preferred the open air. We had great difficulty in getting rid of our ‘spectators,’ who, as on similar occasions, just formed a row as close to the front of the tent as possible. Some stayed even after we shut the flap! I could scarcely take my eyes off one child—a little boy, with a so-called ‘picture’ face. With his fair curly hair and large expressive blue eyes, he could have been any English child of



gentle birth. We were now, of course, close to Nuristan, beyond the range near which we were travelling, and the Nuristani people are noted for their 'European' characteristics and blood. Our men were all Tajiks—all dark, but in widely varying degrees.

One incident on our meadow 'headland' gave us cognizance of the fact that there was another 'weapon' carried by at least one of our men. Near our cooking site was a tiny stream descending to join the main torrent. A good deal below us were two of our men; black objects seemed to be floating from them down the stream. Finally we saw that Kholodot, our "grey horseman" (as we called the only one to cross the river on his grey mount, and he had accompanied us to Mir Samir also), was having his entire head shorn of its black locks by the other—with a 'cut-throat' razor! The former came up without his turban, and a head as smooth as an egg; whether for coolness or some ritual purpose we could not know! In the morning, after a good night's sleep, we found that three of the men had lain outside our tent, 'on guard'; only the fourth had chosen the shelter of our large tent—for they all admitted it was very cold. Another discovery was the small dead body of some species of water-rat, quite a baby and a very beautiful grey colour. It had a very short, flat tail, like a little rudder. We were informed that it had been discovered nibbling one of our sacks, and dispatched.

We left our 'headland' at 8.15 on Thursday, September 15. The men for once were really anxious to get off—perhaps because of the old landowner, more likely in order to reach their goal before nightfall. Anyhow, an hour later we passed another village—Marzadal, where two streams of the river joined, and this stood out rather specially because of really immense 'towers' of dried dung. There had been a good many piles of this very precious commodity near villages we had passed; and in such cases it is no haphazard collection and storage. It is formed, surprisingly, into little evenly sized cakes, and then beautifully stacked—as neatly as if they were stones laid for a house. The dung turns quite black and becomes as hard as a brick, for winter fuel.

This was a strangely up-and-down trek now, for some time,

eventually leading on to a stony and sterile plain, with the mountains and some glaciers on each side of us. All this time we had passed many caravans of animals and people. Some would be kuchis, bound for some new camp; others just individuals or families travelling from one village to another. For the first time we saw many women riding, sometimes with one or more children on the horse beside them; and then there would be cradles, each containing a baby, strapped to other horses, sometimes with the mother, sometimes on its own. The baby's cradle of the Afghan peasant is a very special possession, very heavily constructed, with rockers and thick crossbars, the wooden sides curving up almost over the baby, and the rounded headboard having big knobs, as at the foot too. (The farther we penetrated into the mountains here, the more blue eyes we saw!)

At last we seemed to be *faced* by mountains and glaciers, as well as having them on each side, and there in view at last was a pass. Could it really be the Anjuman? Had we got so far without serious incident? Yes, we were informed, with rather bated breath, that was the Anjuman. It was still to be some time before we halted for the night, on the near side of the pass; and we passed many peaks with the strangest markings on the rock—as if they had been deliberately defaced—scored and scratched, this way and that, the curious lines sometimes forming weird patterns. Finally we dropped down to quite lush land, with water and wild flowers but no villages. We had come to the end of life as lived in ‘villages,’ however small; we had seen the last of that, some time and some long distance back. For some time ahead we were to be as cut off as at the foot of Mir Samir, with, if one cared to dwell on it—which we did not do—an added danger, man-made. On the contrary, we had the feeling that we had got so far, nothing would stop us from achieving our predetermined goal—but for the moment we were content to bide our time. This was all beautiful and exciting anyway, and, strange to say, even here we were to make some new contacts with humanity, although it did seem like the world's end!

Across the river, isolated in the extreme, was a rounded flat hut formed of large, loose stones piled on one another. Outside

this, to the right side as we faced it, was a flat piece of land with a rug spread and thirteen men sitting there as if waiting for our arrival—and probably this was so, for among them sat the young soldier we had seen first with others at Zenēh, and then at Kaujan on our return from Mir Samir—the one who carried a whip! (He seemed to be getting ahead of us, on the later stages of our journey, to prepare the next collection of people to receive us!)

We were greeted most warmly, and, indeed, before we got across the water one or two men had hurried down to help us across the stepping-stones. Further rugs were spread, water was fetched, and it was not long before chai was served to us, most ceremonially. One man was smoking a decorative ‘bubbly’ pipe. The important man of the whole crowd seemed to be in charge of any operations against marauding tribesmen, and apparently was held in much respect by the others. He was well dressed, in the same sort of Afghan cotton coat as Shamaz Nun had worn. In these wilder and more isolated parts he seemed to represent the police. He made rather a point of showing his authority, and asked for our original permit to visit the Hindu Kush at all—and Joyce’s passport, for some reason or other; he must have forgotten to ask for mine! Then the moment the Anjuman Pass was mentioned the old trouble started. He was an impressive-looking individual, but his whole appearance seemed to alter in his excitement and agitation—though we managed, after so much practice, to remain calm!

He tried persuasion—then raged and threatened. At this stage it seemed politic to appear to agree with him—to seem perhaps even a little cowed, when, like all the others, he demonstrated how our throats would be cut. . . . After all, there were some exciting-looking peaks so very near; we could find plenty to do while perhaps wearing him down to agree finally. We suggested this near-by climbing as an alternative—but even this did not seem to give him much more satisfaction as to our plans. So we dropped the subject for the time being; we wanted some rest and refreshment, *not* to make an enemy, and we must pitch our tents. This we did, lower down the incline to the river.

Nearly all the men who had received us mounted their



horses, roaming here and there, and rode away into the dusk. When one really thought about it, it was as extraordinary a situation for them as for us, rather like some very curious dream. Here were two lone women, remote from all civilization, in the midst of all these strange, wild-looking men (though some of them were handsome in their way), men whose own women, in their own land, would never have thought of doing these things we were doing—as if we had always lived that way and there was nothing strange in it. Our attitude obviously infected them, in a sense; for they merely argued with us, as with some other men, never treating us as crazy or unusual, though they had certainly *never* met the like before, and yet, withal, at times showing surprising gallantry, as to the weaker sex. As I remarked to Joyce more than once, what a blessing this was not a *mixed* party: any ‘decent Englishman’ (though we should, of course, have hated him for it) would have felt it his ‘duty’ *not* to take this sort of risk, on *our* account, because we were women; alone, we pleased ourselves!

Before we could settle down for the night we had a foretaste of what was to come—in the way of disagreements among themselves. The cause: flour. Of all four, in spite of our strict agreement at Kaujan, only Malashum, our “stalwart,” had brought any of the precious food. He could hardly be blamed for not wanting to divide it into four parts. So the next thing we knew was that Kholodot, the “grey horseman,” had mounted his horse and was returning to Chalzur. Before going he beckoned to me to see his horse, of which he was so proud. It was still in excellent condition except for a new spot where one of the girths had rubbed. He anxiously suggested that I could do something for it perhaps? He knew I had been worried at Chalzur, because when the horses were divested of their packs one chestnut especially had many sore places along its back under the pack-saddle. I was soon able to treat and pad the grey’s wound. (The chestnut was, sad to say, bleeding from the wounds on its back, when we arrived: the last lap of the journey had made things worse.) We had won the confidence of our own men; they realized we had a sense of fair play. It is up to every one to try to make the world a better place for “everything that hath breath”—man and beast—to try, in

however small a way, to be an "Ambassador for Good." To put it on a very low level, one never loses by it. Our men realized we would help if we could. Kholodot went off for the flour, happy.

Joyce turned in early, and slept like the proverbial log, but I did not feel tired, and tidied our stores somewhat before settling down. When I did get 'bedded down' I got no sleep, and, indeed, it was the most *disturbed* night—by outside agency—that I had so far 'enjoyed.' Oddly enough—though in some ways it was really rather terrifying, in the circumstances of our knowledge of what *could* happen in this somewhat lawless part of Afghanistan—I felt like an outside observer, remaining completely unperturbed, not even thinking it necessary that I should spoil Joyce's slumbers by waking her, as the general racket had not done so!

It happened to be a particularly wild night from a weather point of view: the wind was what could without exaggeration be called a howling gale. None of the men settled down, either in the stone hut, which I had already named "the Outpost," or in the tent. They talked; there were shouts; they wandered about. Then suddenly—another sound broke through all this. A shot rang out in the mountains; not very near (all the worse for that—it was not one of the men here who had fired). It was, anyhow, unmistakable. From that moment it was pandemonium. Shouts were twice as loud and numerous, there was running hither and thither, and there was no further *hope* of peace and quiet. I resigned myself to waiting for daylight.

Joyce rose first, full of brisk enthusiasm to get a meal. There was still a high wind blowing, so she was invited into the Outpost to boil the water. I was trying to make up in rest what I had lacked in sleep, so Joyce brought coffee, to have breakfast in the tent. She also brought the interesting information that in a corner of the Outpost a dozen guns were stacked: reassuring indeed; I never thought I should be so glad to know of a cache of firearms. I was not, I fear, for turning the other cheek, but for selling our lives dearly if need be.

It was difficult to get even our breakfast in peace; the men would come and poke their heads into the tent, and then take a 'front stall' position to see exactly what we were doing. One

man had first greeted us by dangling a tiny, bright-coloured dead bird (which I could not recognize) in front of the tent. I could not imagine any reason for this unless, like the baby rat, it seemed to be attacking our provisions. (They guarded these devotedly.) I am sure it was not deliberately to put us off our breakfast; it did so in my case to a great extent, I fear; and then, to add to our discomfiture, the arguments started not even about the Pass, but the peak we wished to climb. This became so wearying that Joyce abruptly pulled down the tent flap—and they retired, in surprise apparently!

However, we could not stay in peaceful seclusion for long; but when we did emerge they had a reasonable argument for our waiting till “to-morrow” to leave the comparative safety of the Outpost; some men with flocks would be coming through the Pass, guarded by askārs; these askārs would then be able to accompany us to our mountains. The Pass, for us, was not suggested, and we carefully avoided the subject—temporarily! They also hoped to have more flour for themselves. It was, then, more than just a story that these regions were not safe for unarmed travellers; and there is no virtue at all in courting danger, without precautions, when one knows it exists. It would give us a little more time to organize what we must take to our higher camp, and the Outpost was a good place for a Base Camp. Already, it must be admitted, we were rather attached to it, as also to our men—with all their unpredictable ways!

They were generous too, in spite of their very real poverty. Meat is too costly a luxury except for the owner of flocks and herds. Only on rare occasions, we had been told—and we saw for ourselves—did the Afghan peasant have a piece, shared out among several of them. On this particular day they had a fairly large lump, but saved half of it, raw, for their future journey with us. Of what they had cooked they brought us offerings from it. It did not attract me, but it would have hurt them very much to meet with a refusal, I am certain. So we thanked them gratefully, and they were very pleased, it was easy to see.

They boiled all our water, out of the wind, inside the Outpost, and came and ‘chatted’ with us during a lazy afternoon. The cynical and the incredulous might well say this was



impossible: two women with virtually no Farsi (a language of Afghanistan as well as of Iran), owning a book with phonetic phrases and vocabulary—and half a dozen men with (at that time) no English at all, in any form! With no education except from the book of life, they were quick in the uptake and most anxious to find out about Great Britain—and London! (Once before Joyce had drawn rough maps to show them the water of the Channel between us and Europe.) How did we travel in trains and ships? They had never, of course, seen either, and knew little about them. It is indeed odd, when one reflects, that for them those means of travel are mysterious and exciting—whereas the odd plane is a commonplace, of which they hear often—indeed, can see, on occasion. ‘Civilization’ works in such bounds to-day that, here and there in the world, stages in the procedure get left out entirely: Iceland has jumped from the twisted wick in oil, for lighting, to an all-electric world, with never the intermediate gaslight. Afghanistan has progressed, for travel, from the horse and camel, *via* the motor-car, but never a train—to the aeroplane. The average Afghan has no amenities, yet he knows about radio, even if he has never heard it, though we saw an occasional set, such as at Zenēh.

One of the men whom we had met at the Outpost told us he had four wives. Of our own men, only Kholodot, the “grey horseman,” was unmarried. He returned with his flour, almost as we spoke of him! The others had one or two wives. These facts and much else we found out from them during a most lively afternoon, and in a happily relaxed mood—when we all learned something of another language and another way of life—using plenty of dumb show!

I had given Joyce an account of our most turbulent night, and now apparently the men were—presumably as a result of the night’s happenings—intending to take precautions for the safety of us and our possessions. They seriously and genuinely wanted us to sleep inside the low stone hut. Joyce and I, however, rather felt this was as great an evil as the risk of a raid—we should be stifled! When the men found we could not be persuaded they insisted on moving our tent up to the level of the stone hut. They then proceeded to *camouflage* it by draping rugs and hangings over and around it. Their next precaution

was to bring all our stores into the shelter of the three walls that looked like a tiny sheepfold, leading to the circular, roughly-roofed-over, inner sanctum, where one could hardly stand upright—but which was larder, kitchen, bedroom, gunroom, sometimes for six or seven tall men. It was like a conjuring trick, to see them ‘pouring’ out of it, at times!

We had protested that all this moving of our goods—for it was no easy matter—was not necessary. The answer was for them to point meaningly at the mountains and make the gesture of shooting or throat-cutting. They did not move the smaller tent, but no one slept in it; they lay near us on guard, or patrolled, all night. Being unable to get to sleep, I know this was so, for one man (an askār, I think) *sang* all night: the mournful, moaning cadences would sound miles away, grow louder until he passed again, then die away in the remoteness of the opposite direction, and so on *ad infinitum*, it seemed. It was maddening when one longed for sleep, but his steadfastness in duty could not but impress one; we had a great deal for which to be truly grateful. Morning came, sooner than sleep.

At last all was in order for leaving for the range, which was in horseshoe formation, we hoped to reach, before any serious arguments were started. We had five men now, all mounted and armed, for we had not so many stores that the horses had to be entirely pack animals; weights were well distributed, and it would not be a long trek. We had barely got under way, when our rather elegant Police Chief from the Outpost, whom we somewhat vulgarly called “the Boss,” followed, well armed, of course. I said to Joyce, “He means to see we do not turn *left*, to the Anjuman Pass!” We did not suggest doing so: we were ready for yet another adventure or two elsewhere first.

*Hindu Kush at Closest Quarters*

**A**LTHOUGH we were determined not to leave the area without going to the Anjuman Pass, we were content for the moment to bide our time and enjoy to the full the upper reaches of the Panjshir. The men, too, seemed happy in the companionship of the guardians of the Outpost, so it was a cheerful party that set off to establish a camp higher up the valley. The chief of the Outpost, dressed in a light-blue flowing robe ornamented with braid, rode his horse proudly, his gun slung around his shoulders at the ready. The askār came too, fondly fingering the trigger of his gun, the envy of our men who had to be content with carrying our ice-axes. I think they really hoped some Nuristanis would come rushing down the slope so that they could use their weapons and show us what fighters they were!

We struck uphill to a point where two small streams converged, then followed the left-hand tributary as it led us more steeply up to snow-covered peaks while the right-hand stream meandered round gentler slopes. Treading on soft grass where patches of blue and yellow flowers shone amid the grey stones, we reached a plateau, above which rose bare rocky hillsides. Realizing that farther than this there would be no feed for the horses and no water near at hand for us, we agreed to stop here and make a camp. This must have been a regular halting-place for nomads, for there were signs of horses and cattle around. Our horses were let loose to feed, and their riders soon had a dung fire going, on which we made tea for all.

Thirst and hunger satisfied, we made a reconnaissance with Bordashec so that we were able to discuss plans for the morrow; we were rather tired of inaction and frustration, so decided to tackle the highest point we could see, a jagged cone rising to the north-east of the camp. On its upper ridges we could see snow on which we longed to set our feet and so reach the summit. With this in mind and the necessity for an early start the next



morning, we retired early to our sleeping-bags, but were kept awake for several hours by the chatter of the men outside, who lay on the stony ground wrapped in their cloaks, talking till the small hours of the morning.

Eleanor woke me at 5 A.M. on Sunday, September 18. After some protest at the early hour I got up and roused the men, who made tea on their dung fire, which they had kept going most of the night. An hour later Eleanor, Abdur Rahman, Malashum, and I were climbing the slope above the camp, and, as the sun rose higher in the clear sky, made our way down the other side and up on slippery shale to another height beyond. From this vantage-point above the valley from which we intended to make the climb we could pick out a route which seemed interesting and within our capabilities. Two thousand feet of rock would have to be negotiated before we reached the snow-line, and it looked as if 500 feet of snow and ice would then bring us to a summit of about 16,000 feet.

We ran and glissaded down the shale on the other side of our eminence to the valley beyond, and continued up it till we were at the foot of a long rock rib which appeared to lead upward at a steep angle to the summit. This was as far as the men would go, so, leaving our extra clothing and food with them, we took the lighter of the two ropes and set off. We toiled up a scree formed by the continual downpouring of fine particles of rock, and were glad to arrive at the rib itself. We put on the rope and were still able to move, both together; when after a while the climbing became more difficult we had to move one at a time. I had great difficulty in finding suitable belays, for the rock was very treacherous. After a time I treated each projection as suspect till I had proved its stability, and often had to try two or three before finding anything secure. The distance between us was never more than thirty feet, for we doubled the rope for extra security. Eleanor was climbing at a great disadvantage because she could not grasp the rock tightly with her damaged right hand and had to try to find a left-hand hold before moving. This embarrassment caused her to spend a long time at a difficult stance, deciding what to do, saying (quite rightly), "I can't come up the way you did and must find another way." She always eventually succeeded, but this was time-consuming,

and at first we seemed to make little impression on the long slope which stretched almost vertically upward.

At one point the doubled rope hanging behind me divided round a large, pointed rock which stood out from the general slope; I halted and called to Eleanor to come on and release the rope as she came up to it. She could not, however, get into a suitable position to fling it off the point, so I suggested that she untied herself at this stance and pulled the end thus freed. This was impossible, as the rope had tightened behind her, so I had to untie myself and throw the free end of the rope down to her. Still she could do nothing, so I climbed down to her position and released the rope, and we decided to unrope, but, with difficulties increasing, we could not hope to reach the summit that day, in time to get down in daylight.

We next decided to try to cross the glacier which now swept down by our side, but there was no safe belay, and the angle was too steep (almost perpendicular) to risk walking across the slope, even in crampons, without good support. So we again took to the rib, still unroped. Earlier, when I had pulled on the rope to test the security of the loop, a pyramid of rock, three feet high, came away and rolled down the slope!

Climbing now over bigger and more solid rocks, we made a better pace. At the top of a ten-foot rock wall we peered over its edge, and there was Malashum, sitting calmly on a large slab a hundred or so feet below us! He was grinning all over his face, thoroughly pleased with himself at this, his first piece of mountaineering. His only desire now was to show us the easy way down.

We hoped, however, to gain a little more height before finishing for the day, so continued on, up the rocks. Here they were decidedly slippery with a thin coating of ice, and I had not gone far before I felt my feet slipping from under me. I called out to Eleanor, "I'm falling! I'm falling!" but managed to check myself, spreadeagled on a slab above her. She managed to come up to me and, putting her hand underneath my foot, enabled me to get a firm stance once more. We went a little farther, each trying a different route, but the rock became increasingly brittle and slippery, and we decided that we had gone far enough. We therefore rejoined Malashum, who set off

down at a fast pace, leaping from rock to rock. We followed more cautiously, and eventually arrived at the spot where Abdur Rahman still sat waiting. He had had a happy day, basking in the sunshine.

Back at the camp just before sunset, we were congratulated by the chief, who had been watching us throughout the climb, for he was the proud possessor of field-glasses, which he had probably obtained from a kuchi. There were the usual arguments against staying here any longer; but once more we prevailed. He, however, had had enough and returned down to the Outpost, leaving his gun with Abdur Rahman and injunctions to protect us with it.

This was a red-letter day for our men, for some one had brought up a piece of a leg of beef, a rare luxury. We had offered them some of our corned beef, but they were always suspicious and would not even try it. Of course, they were Mohammedans, and it may be that their religion forbade them to eat meat killed in any but the way approved of by their 'priests.' I watched their preparations with interest, and wrote down the following recipes for Afghan food:

### 1. *How to cook gau*

Hack as much meat as possible off a leg of beef with a knife or an ice-axe. Pour water from the stream over the meat and wring out the pieces by hand. Put them into a saucepan without a lid and cover with water. Add salt, and cook over a dung fire for two or three hours. Ceremoniously offer this to your English guests in a china tea-bowl. Eat with the fingers. Next day stew the bones and pour the resulting broth over gandum (see next recipe): add any remaining bits of meat and hand round in a large bowl from man to man.

### 2. *How to cook gandum*

Take flour, ground between two flat stones, from millet or barley grown on the land by the river, add water from the stream, and make into a stiff dough. Shape into thin rounds and mark top with bent knuckles. Find a suitable flake of rock that will cover the top of your dung fire and bake on



this. Turn over when one side is browned and cook for a further half-hour.

### 3. *How to make chai*

Boil water in a pan and throw in a handful of tea, or the portion allotted to you by your European companions. Half fill a bowl with sugar and pour the tea over it. Drink as hot as possible.

The evening was cool, so that every one was glad to get to bed early. Lying cosily in our down bags, we talked of the day's work: we had enjoyed a day of strenuous climbing after so much slow walking up the valley, and toyed with the idea of having another try at the summit, but there were so many untrodden heights around us that it seemed a pity to repeat anything. The possibilities of the other arm of the stream intrigued us: the unknown is always tempting, and in this case the view was cut off by the slope of the mountain separating the two arms of the river. Eleanor suggested an early start to take in a climb if we found one we liked, but I felt we needed an off day between climbs, so we finally compromised by planning to go 'round the bend' with a view to seeing the possibilities for a future occasion.

We were a little tired of having the men with us all the time, and had come to the conclusion that there was nothing in this idea that we should be murdered; the next morning, therefore, while they were still dozing, we went down to the stream, ostensibly to wash in the pool, which made a natural bath surrounded by flowers, and then continued on down the valley to the junction. We climbed up the black rocks separating us from the other branch of the stream and looked down on to a broad, gentle valley flanked by the grass-covered slopes of mountains rising to about 14,000 feet. In the distance we could see cattle grazing by the water and, beyond, a blue lake.

As we stood gazing at this peaceful scene a hail from behind signalled the arrival of Abdur Rahman, gun in hand! He professed to be very shocked at the way we had gone off without telling him, and, pointing first to his gun and then to the upper mountain slopes, intimated that we needed him for protection,

and were foolish to have risked our lives without him. This seemed strange talk in so peaceful a landscape; but, in fact, only a comparatively low range now divided us from ill-famed Nuristan!

My thoughts were far away as we wandered on, but I was brought back with a start to the present by the feel of hot breath on my neck. Turning hastily, I faced Malashum, who had crept up silently behind me, in my gym shoes (which I had given him). He also seemed to be reprimanding us for slipping away alone, but agreed reluctantly to continue up the new valley. Just then his eye caught the footprint of a deer, and without any further encouragement he followed the tracks down to the water's edge and up the bank of the stream, in exactly the direction we wished to take! Abdur Rahman followed, gun at the ready, and the next hour slipped by without our noticing it. We were able to go right up to the herd of cattle feeding by the water's edge, though Malashum warned us not to go within reach of their long curved horns. They were the biggest and strongest animals we had yet seen, and had the shaggy coats of Highland cattle. Cattle in general were so thin and gave so little milk that we wished we could have brought some British bulls with us to build up the breed. What a blessing a good milk-supply would have been to those babies we had seen in the valley, being carried on their mothers' backs; or to the toddlers clinging to them.

The day was now too far advanced for a climb, so we decided to go back to the camp and return the next day. The weather seemed set fair again, and the temperature stood at 88 degrees at camp, although there was a keen wind blowing. It was necessary to find a good shelter for the cooking, and in the end we had to resort to a crack between rocks. Malashum was very patient in holding the pan above the flame until the water boiled, as there was no ledge on which to stand the stove and no room to build up stones around it. When the fragrant smell of oxtail soup arose he patted his empty stomach and made signs of distress, and when we cooked the dehydrated fish-cakes he could bear it no longer and went away to join the others. A few minutes later they all three came round with an empty flour-bag and intimated that they had nothing left to eat. We offered

them a share of our food, but, as usual, they would have none of it except dry biscuits and Kendal Mint Cake (which they loved because of its high sugar content). Kholodot asked for money to go back to Chalzur and buy gandum; and, in face of their entreating looks, we could do nothing but give him the 30 afghanis needed. No sooner had he gone than a large bag of flour was produced and the others settled down to making chupatties!

Tuesday, September 20, was one of the most pleasant days of the whole expedition. We walked in a beautiful valley in pleasant sunshine, had two or three hours of easy climbing, and achieved a summit. Accompanied by Abdur Rahman and Malashum, we made an early start, following the route of the previous day until we reached the second stream. We crossed on good stones where the bed was about twenty feet wide and only a few feet deep, then turned south to a col between two summits. Malashum caught sight of a deer and, pointing excitedly to the mountain-side, hurried on ahead; but by the time we had caught up with him it had disappeared again. However, he never gave up hope, and by this means attained his first summit. Abdur Rahman remained in the valley, nursing an aching tooth and a bad head: from time to time on our way up we were able to pick out the maroon of his coat as he sat by the churning water.

We had looked forward to setting our feet on the snow of the summit, but when we came to it we found that the snowfield was an ice formation consisting of rows of jagged pinnacles ten feet high blown into sharp points and feathers by the wind. Beyond and above this was a pile of rock leading to the summit, which we attained before noon. To our surprise, on the highest point we found a cairn, and within it a small tin with a screw lid. Opening it, we discovered a note written in German, which I deciphered thus:

“Dieser Berg, 4270 meter hoch wie t—— ihn ‘Schönblick’ werde von der Nürnberger Hindu Kush rundfahrt Germany am 14 Juli 1959 ersteigen.”

HANS VOGEL  
THEO STOCKINGER



So two Germans from Nürnberg had already climbed the mountain! This was an unexpected *dénouement*, for I personally thought we were the first people to have been up this valley. At any rate we were the second party and the first women to have reached the summit of "Beautiful View"; so we added our little note and put it into the tin with the first, screwing the lid carefully to make it airtight. Our altimeter registered just 14,000 feet, a little higher than the German estimate.

A fine long ridge stretched ahead, taking in one or two peaks, and, as the day was still young, we went along it for an hour or so. From this route we had wonderful views of the mountains and valleys around. We were above a horseshoe valley, on the far side of which was the long south-west ridge of the mountain we had climbed two days before; beyond it again was the camp site. It appeared now that we might have climbed our difficult mountain by this ridge, but the rock looked horribly rotten, broken, and barren, and it would not have been a pleasant climb. The side on which we were now walking was more pleasant, and there was a considerable amount of snow on the peaks at the head of this valley. Time forbade more excursions on this occasion, but we hoped that things might so turn out that we should return another year to explore farther!

We were pulled up by a "gendarme" needing the use of a rope, and, as we had left this with Malashum, who had spent the time sleeping in the sunshine, we returned. All three of us set off down the slope, using the splash of red signifying Abdur Rahman's coat as our goal, each arriving by his own route. Abdur was still feeling rather miserable with a bad head, probably brought on by the altitude, to which he was not accustomed.

We continued along the stream round the bend towards the camp, and on the way back discussed the Anjuman Pass project again. We found that the two men were quite ready to go with us, if we could persuade the Headman of the Outpost to withdraw his opposition. We decided, therefore, to strike while the iron was hot, pack up immediately on return, and get back to the Outpost that night, ready for a start to the Anjuman the following morning if we were lucky. Leaving Eleanor to saunter back, picking any new varieties of flowers, I hurried along so as

to have tea ready on her arrival and to get the packing started. It was now late in September and got dark early, so that if we were to reach the Outpost with enough daylight to put up the tent and do some cooking we should have to go down soon after 3 P.M.

Tea was ready by 2 P.M., and all the men were assembled expectantly, but there was no sign of Eleanor. We drank ours and left hers simmering on the side of the fire so that we could start to pack. An hour later she appeared with a good bunch of flowers to add to the collection: this was to be her last chance in the Hindu Kush. She now sat down in the tent away from the wind, and began to arrange the flowers between the absorbent sheets of paper which the Kew Herbarium had provided. After half an hour I said with determination that we really must be getting on our way down, but Eleanor was anxious to finish before leaving. A few minutes later I saw the tent gradually subsiding on Eleanor and her flowers, for the men, glad to be going back, had started pulling up the pegs. Eleanor, however, managed to finish, and we were finally off by 4.15 P.M., so it was beginning to get dark when we reached the Outpost. We found, to our secret relief, that the Headman had gone off down the valley, and it was easy, therefore, to arrange for a start for the Anjuman Pass the following morning. The men were by this time quite good at putting up the tent, so I left them to deal with it while I heated some soup. Having consumed this by the light of a torch, we retired to sleep, buoyed up by the hope of at last realizing our ambition of reaching the Anjuman and seeing the peaks of the Pamirs.

*Near-murder among Friends—but the Anjuman  
Pass at Last*

WHEN we were once more at our 'home' at the Outpost we could not help feeling that good fortune was on our side, for the Police Chief—"the Boss"—was away. Temporarily there was yet another askār there. He was young and friendly-disposed—and, whether he had known about the previous trouble over our going to the Anjuman or not, he seemed more amenable. We made it clear that we meant to go the next day to the Pass, and there were definitely fewer arguments against the idea than formerly. In fact, by the time we settled in for the night, our tent tacked on to the Outpost itself, as before, it really was an established fact that we would go "to-morrow morning." It seemed now impossible that it was agreed at last! We slept peacefully without disturbance—a good omen.

We got up in good heart, to find that the men had also 'slept on it,' but now felt differently about it. It was to us like a mortal blow: they would not go on. This was just too much; we had been buoyed up, and were now let down with a crash.

I had first suggested it—so long ago now, it seemed. I would put up a fight for it. I raved and stormed, and said, with the operative Farsi words I could muster, that yesterday it was "yes," to-day it was "no." Therefore they were as "bad" as could possibly be—which simple reasoning, though possibly open to challenge, I could see was taking effect. As I was so wound up, Joyce obviously thought another voice would only confuse the issue, and stood by while I followed up my advantage and used the final argument, "No Anjuman, no afghanis," and this time I made sure they heard it! I had really no need to repeat it, and they were off to get the horses. We had won!

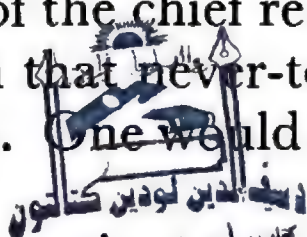
It had been previously decided by the men themselves that this time Joyce and I would *ride* with them through the Pass as



far as we could penetrate without going into forbidden Nuristan. We would not need to take many provisions, because we had never been so foolish or so foolhardy as to think of camping in this trouble zone. We should achieve our aim—to traverse this strange, wild Pass, and be the first European women to do it—*alone* certainly. The men assured us emphatically we were the *only* ones. Be this as it may, we were apparently the first lone women from Great Britain. We could return the same day, before dark, to the Outpost.

A black horse was brought for Joyce, and Kholodot's big grey was to be mine, when it came. I said jokingly to Joyce, "You'd better get on it before they change their minds again!" which she did! Our four men, the small elderly man who had four wives, the new askār, and a pleasant young fellow with a pockmarked face made up the complement of seven at the Outpost for the time being. All had been very friendly together. But we were to witness as violent and terrifying a change in human attitudes and relationships in these temperamental Afghans in as short a space of time as any we had seen in weather conditions, with such incredulity, on Mir Samir.

On looking back after a lapse of time I cannot help thinking that it was this same incredulity, this *not* believing how very serious the situation really was (because it had come on one so suddenly), that is one of the chief reasons there were no corpses outside the Outpost on that never-to-be-forgotten day. Also—I do believe in miracles. One would have to do so anyway, after that day.



I saw the grey horse coming up the slope from the water, and started to go towards it. Then some movement behind me, and a shout, made me turn round. Two of the men (one of them was the small man, apparently in charge now at the Outpost) were locked in deadly combat almost in its entrance. One seemed to be trying to get at the other's throat, while the other was trying to bring up one of our ice-axes to crash down on his opponent's head. Without any coherent thought I rushed up to them, as the small man went down and the other leapt on his chest. I yelled at them, and the man on top dropped the axe—why I do not know—turned and rushed at another man. Meantime the small man, remarkably resilient and lithe

(though we had called him "old" before), was up—and leaping on to a fourth man. I then dashed to the first pair, who were trying to strangle each other, got between them—and they separated—and I darted, screaming (in English, all the time) at the second pair, one of whom had got hold of an ice-axe again. This time *I* got hold of the axe and threw it as far away as I could.

All this had happened so quickly, I had forgotten where we were supposed to be going—but suddenly saw Joyce through the dust and rushing figures, and shouted to her, "Don't get off that horse *whatever* you do, or they won't take us"—and Joyce 'sat tight,' the wisest thing she could do. There was a temporary lull, and we next saw one of them (Abdur Rahman, or Malashum, the stalwart—for they stood out from the others, being big and powerful) rushing into the Outpost and out again in a second, with a sack of something (flour, of course) which he threw, with terrific force, high into the air—and it came down—and burst. Then all the fighting started again. Now Abdur Rahman, easily seen in his old maroon-coloured coat, rushed on the small man, who went down at once—and the former, quite twice the size of the latter, jumped on him and began banging his head on the hard ground. I shrieked at him, "You can't do that, you can't do that," and seized his wrists. He stopped—and rushed to his horse; he was actually *sobbing*, and tears of rage were pouring down his cheeks. I took the chance to scream at Joyce, "Stay on the horse—stay on the horse"—which she nobly did. Abdur Rahman was throwing things off his horse for some reason that, at that moment, we could not fathom. Next he dashed into the Outpost like one gone berserk, and out again, with a wooden bowl for making bread; it was flung aloft with his powerful arms, and fell to the ground—and broke. That sight redoubled his rage; he was terrifying (though I was not terrified of him; I cannot think of a good reason for not being so). It had been so sudden, and then so swift-moving a drama, that only certain ones of the pairs, each apparently having to be fighting *some one*, imprinted themselves on my vision or mind—I hardly know which was functioning. Anyhow, for the first time, I really *saw* the askār—he seemed to be getting his gun ready for action. I ran towards



him, but Abdur Rahman got there first. The gun somehow fell to the ground, and Abdur Rahman, with both hands, was pulling out the cartridges from the belt slung across the askār's chest—and they were falling in showers round us. Then for the horror—and the miracle—the askār pulled out a *knife*; what, subconsciously, I had dreaded. I jumped between them with a choked sort of scream (my English deserted me at last), and the next thing I knew—they had parted on each side of me and I was standing alone.

The dust was subsiding. One of the horses was having the time of his life, eating the flour. The pieces of wooden bowl were being removed. Abdur Rahman was packing up and reloading his horse. Malashum had mounted his own; and the small man, who seemed to have 'taken' the most, physically, was now walking into the Outpost as if nothing had happened. The askār and the boy were tidying up the cartridges; Kholodot and Bordashec were leading their horses, the former beckoning to me to mount the grey, which I did; and, with no words, those of us going to the Pass were moving off—*just like that*. . . .

About an hour or more later, when we were well and truly into the Pass, at long last, after so many and strange vicissitudes, Joyce turned round from the front of the train and made the first remark that either of us had made since she sat her horse and I, quite literally, had run round in circles. All she said was, "I'm glad you're still with us"—and turned back again. And for the first time I felt a chilling sort of fear—for what *could* have happened to me a dozen times over in that horrifying performance; or again, and worse, to my imagination, one or more of *them* could now be lying there, lifeless.

Yes, again I had plenty of reason for thanksgiving. We tried to piece things together later. We never knew the exact cause; obviously flour was the beginning of it. It is difficult for us in Great Britain, so affluent by comparison, to realize how bread is their very life. Perhaps the small man had plenty and would not share it; or some one had been accused of stealing some. Possibly Abdur Rahman was trying to show he had none hidden in his horse's pack. I really do not think they knew, half the time, whom they were fighting, or why. The ones on the trek to the Pass were completely at one again; at night all sat



together in perfect amity, where they had tried to end one another's life.

It was strange yet varied scenery in the Pass's desolation and utter loneliness. It was the sort of stark, raw, naked beauty, a beauty of line rather than of material or colour, that has always very specially appealed to me, in nature—more even than lush loveliness where nature has been kind. Our horses were wonderful. I have done a good deal of riding and jumping and am fairly used to horses, but Joyce has not ridden much, yet had no difficulty; the animal never let her down—on tracks that at times were mere ledges, mules' terrain, or donkeys', with sudden steep dips and inclines.

The Pass went off to the left of our first 'horseshoe' nearer to the Outpost than our camp had been. At first the scenery resembled the horseshoe—rocky peaks with some snow and glaciers—but gradually the Pass grew narrower, and we would cross from one side to the other, wherever was the best footing for the horses; the mountains were lower but more 'on top of' one. It was easy to imagine how very simple it was for anyone almost immediately above one, with a single shot, to bring a whole caravan to a standstill while possibly one or more other tribesmen would come down for the loot. Hiding-places above, of all sorts, were innumerable; below there was no cover for whatever passed that way. It was easier than ever to believe that *incidents*, whether rare or frequent, were eternally possible, a 'gift' to the raider, unless faced with eternal vigilance from the askārs. The very scene itself seemed to be asking for trouble. The sides of the Pass were often mere steeply sloping pieces of desert, arid and bare; yet still one could not see over the top. (Not for anything would the men let us investigate.)

It was this perpetual mystery that one could well understand filled the traveller who had to pass that way—probably carrying his entire worldly wealth—with deep foreboding, and quelled his spirit; for one cannot imagine cowardice among Afghan attributes. Yet, if anything had happened to us, the men knew they were all answerable to the Government itself, for we were sponsored by that Government. We had realized at the very beginning that the police, at the Afghan frontier of Iran when our kitbag was missing, felt they were responsible.

We would not have let the men down, either; we would have fought if necessary, as we had insisted on coming.

Some of the rock-formation looked absolutely primeval, with the strangest markings we had ever seen. It took no vivid imagination to realize this must have been under water; much of the land looked like the sea-bed itself, and the water-worn boulders high above us must surely have come from some sea-shore. It resembled Anatolia—once covered by the sea. On our way to Afghanistan we had had that wonderful view of Turkey's Mount Ararat from the Soviet side of Armenia. It may perhaps be maintained that the story of the Ark is a myth; it cannot be maintained that the Flood is one.

After nearly two hours we came to the top of the Pass, commanding a wonderful view of glaciers—and this was the closest we were to get to the Pamirs, of which we had seen so many lovely recent photographs at the Georgian Alpine Club. They provided a thrilling backcloth of giant, snowcapped peaks; we had had a very distant view of them from the summit of the "Schönblick." They seemed to dominate one of the loveliest valleys I can remember seeing anywhere. Between the nearer and lower, dark rocky peaks with their light snow coverings and smaller glaciers, it wound its way into the unseeable distance, like a dark green river of vegetation, jewelled with shining, light-blue lakes. This had perforce to be the end of our quest.

It had been a thousand times worth all the wear and tear of arguing and bargaining, threatening and cajoling, and our men were, I think, as happy in our pleasure, and as pleased that they were the agents of it, as we were to have arrived. We still had to make the return journey—but could die happy now!

Our pleasant askār (knife-incident forgotten) met in with a fellow-guardian of the peace, also armed, of course. He had delicious almonds (threaded on a string), which he shared with us. It was always so: what they had, however little, they would share—and Joyce and I knew how to be grateful. At their suggestion, although the wind was bitter and violent, we climbed a steep several hundred feet to a fine eminence, where we had a still wider view around—and the askārs searched the skyline, for trouble. This was Khotal, a notorious trouble-spot.

We all rested and relaxed at our high viewpoint, and below,

in turn shared refreshments with a few passers-by. The return journey passed without incident, on our excellent horses, but it was like a new journey when we gazed in reverse; and the strangeness of the *historic* Pass (from our point of view, and possibly when considering Alexander the Great) made perhaps an even greater impact as we saw many new things, or more accurately, many things that had escaped our notice.

Safely back at the Outpost once more, we prepared to leave next morning. This we were able to do by about ten o'clock. It was just a little sad to be seeing that stone hut for the last time, my one souvenir some lovely little yellow flowers which I hoped would survive for the Herbarium at Kew Gardens. In the whole Anjuman Pass I had seen one dandelion—not another bloom, scarcely a root, anywhere.

We had quite a welcome at Chalzur, but did not need to camp this time; yoghurt and bread were brought to us with the customary and kind generosity; and we went on our way refreshed. We fell in with various people on the track, who tacked on to the little train. One of these was an old man on a grey horse accompanying a black bullock. When we came to the green semicircle, where we had met the unpleasant and aggressive stranger on his bedecked horse, when trying to get to the Anjuman, this old man took Joyce, across the river to be forded there, on his horse. Abdur Rahman, this time, took me on his broad back; he had immense strength, against the current, more useful here than in the dreadful fight. The bullock decided to swim downstream for a bit, before he managed to stumble across alone.

We did not halt until we reached the nearest part of Mir Sakanderbeg (on the same side of the river to which we had recently crossed), where on our trek to the Outpost I had damaged a finger again. We were well above that steep 'street,' beside a mud-brick house, with 'battlements' and small unglazed windows; and between the former, and through the latter, there always seemed to be a female face peeping! When we returned the gaze there would be a smile, sometimes a laugh—and then the face would vanish. The unveiled girl or woman is always more shy than the boy or man, at first.

We were to camp for the night in what was an odd sort of



garden. This was a fairly large rectangle, formally planted round with poplars, and in the centre was a smaller, sunk rectangle, which somehow looked as if it ought to be a swimming-pool, but certainly was not one! It proved extremely suitable for dealing with the stove, out of the wind—as usual, many villagers helping!

Of course, one of the first to welcome us was the old headman, prophet of Doom. He enjoyed our miming the throat-cutting! Our tent was pitched on the brink of the sunk patch. What we could not foresee was that after dark, and we had retired behind our 'flap' to sleep, the whole village (it seemed) assembled to sit round the 'pool,' feet dangling, while the most terrible 'wireless' ever heard (even in the days of crystal sets) was played—trying every station in the world, one would think; for a few moments each one: amusing at first—until in the small hours, driven nearly mad (we had not wanted to be spoilsports), we politely protested. They all drifted away, and the silence of the grave reigned. What a pity we had been so long in acting! Before we left there was much 'first aid' to be done; there were always sad, hopeless cases. We crossed the river, by the reasonably good bridge, for our last lap.

The final rest, before Kaujan, was at our loved 'oasis,' where we had seen the yellow bird. This time it was not so hot, and we watched a young man and a little boy fashioning large 'hooks' out of willow-branches, such as we had seen used to fasten the woven goats'-hair bands round the packs on horses, donkeys, and camels. Primitive, perhaps; clever, yes.

It was pleasant to see Kaujan in the distance, by the very lovely river, knowing we should be welcomed; and we certainly were accorded great congratulation on our trip. We were among old friends again.

*Farewell to Afghanistan*

THE rectangle of hard-beaten earth upon which we pitched our tent for the last time in Kaujan had, after three visits, acquired character through familiarity. It signified for us the life of the people of the valley—hard and unchanged through centuries, yet containing the latent vitality that could so quickly be released by modern knowledge.

We were pleased to see again the familiar faces of old Nao Ruz, Nurnamad, Shamaz Nun, and the other three horsemen of the Mir Samir party. I suppose they were pleased to see us, but their chief concern was to find out what remained for baksheesh! They eyed each item as it emerged from the kitbags and stood ready to pounce on any tins that might now be discarded. We allotted what we could now spare, as fairly as possible, but we had still much to carry forward and needed the tins ourselves.

With all the village around us and Shamaz Nun as interpreter by our side, we handed 450 afghanis (£4 10s.) to each of the four who had been with us to the Anjuman Pass and an extra 50 afghanis each to Abdur Rahman and Malashum, who had been on all the climbs with us. They were all very pleased, and we felt that we were leaving behind an atmosphere of friendship which should help future parties. Abdur Rahman, Kholodot, and Malashum volunteered to come with us to Zenēh, but Bordashec had to get in his crops, and it was with difficulty that we found some one to take his place. It was only necessary to find another rider; eventually Manakram came (we always called him “Lilac Turban,” going to Mir Samir—because of his delicate chiffon headdress). As we were expecting to recover 600 afghanis from Karimboula at Zenēh, we offered this as the payment—150 afghanis per horse.

We were ready at ten o'clock the next morning, with three horses packed and enough left over to load the fourth. Feeling thankful that all was amicably settled, I sat in the sun with my

back against a hot wall, awaiting peacefully the moment of departure. Eleanor wandered down the road, where the horses stood waiting. She found that Abdur Rahman was loading the brown horse which had a raw place on its spine—although he had promised the night before to leave *this* one behind. Eleanor refused to go on with it, and Abdur Rahman appealed to me—saying that it was a good horse. As this had no effect, he then brought up his little girl and indicated that he needed the money for his family! Eleanor asked Shamaz Nun if *he* would lend a horse—and he obligingly came to the rescue, and said he had a horse which could go. He himself could not accompany us, but he would put Abdur in charge of it.

So all was settled, after argument and persuasion, more exhausting than physical discomfort, and we set off on the return journey. I was extremely glad when a halt was called for the night by the edge of the stream close to some primitive dwellings. These were little more than caves in the hillside, but a whole family lived there, keeping their cows and goats on the pasture by the water. They made tea for us and gave us the first fresh milk we had had for a long time. The children gathered around and watched us goggle-eyed and silent for long periods until the women came to join them, when tongues were loosed. We gave them sweets, but it took much persuasion to get them to put them into their mouths; after the first taste, however, they were eager for more. It was cold here, but there was plenty of wood for a fire which kept the men warm, and we all had a comfortable night.

Two boys came with us on our journey the next day, for no particular reason unless it was that they hoped for medical treatment. The eyes of one were so inflamed that he could hardly see, and wore a band across his forehead to keep the glare of the sun from his eyes. At the end of another long day we arrived at Dasht-i-Revat, where we were welcomed again by the headman and the villagers. This time no carpet was brought for us to sleep on, for it was cold enough to need the tent. We were able to buy two melons in the village, each large enough for four or five meals, and the men, too, were able to get tea and food, but we preferred our own cooking and used up some of our stores. Our cooking was watched with great interest by



the men and children, and we had difficulty in keeping their dirty hands away from the food. We noticed with interest that the Volkswagen of the Germans we had met on our way up the valley was still here.

The nearer I got to civilization, the more tired I seemed to get; and before we reached our destination the next day I had weakened and accepted a ride on a horse. Eleanor went on ahead, and by the time I came to the familiar buildings lining the street of Zenēh she had gone inside to commence negotiations with Karimboula. A crowd had already assembled, and I soon picked out Fiezela, grinning all over his face as he helped to unload the horses. I joined Eleanor, having found her sitting in a room where Karimboula was engaged in deep conversation with two other men. It was a long time before he could give us his attention, but eventually our turn came.

After long absence our knowledge of Farsi had considerably increased, and we were able to tell him that we had paid the horsemen at Kaujan 600 afghanis and now wanted back the 600 we had left with him, assuming that he had paid over to the donkey-men the remaining 300. He affected great surprise at such a request and entered into a lengthy argument which we could not understand, although, I hope, we looked intelligent. We played our next trump card and produced the receipt for the 600 afghanis which we had given him, and the receipt for 600 afghanis which Shamaz Nun had given us! These were considered in great detail by the three men, and at last, very reluctantly, Karimboula offered us three 100 afghani notes. On our refusal to accept the money he said that it would be necessary to telephone to Kabul. We were pleased to hear this as we felt that Gul Mohammed would support us and we should be able to explain the situation to him, so that he could retell it to Karimboula, in case the latter had not understood our Farsi. History repeated itself, and we were marched up the hill again to the derelict building with the one telephone in the middle of the bare room. Another man, superior even to Karimboula, was now in charge of the ruined house, and he, after hearing both sides of the case, put in a call to Kabul.

A long conversation ensued, and I only just managed to stop him from putting back the receiver before I had had a word

with the Tourist Office. Gul Mohammed was not there, but I spoke to Mr Kapissa, a senior official (whom we had met), who readily agreed that we must have our 600 afghanis back, but mentioned that the officials in Zenēh would expect something. Passing over that, I went on to ask about a vehicle to take us and our remaining baggage from Zenēh to Kabul. I was very anxious that we should not have to pay for another private 'bus,' so I impressed on him that we had very little left. He was very vague about what he could get, but said that he would do his best, although he could not tell us what it would cost.

As he rang off I turned back to the Afghan, who said smilingly that we should get our 600 afghanis back, but that the men must each pay him 50 afghanis. We were quietly indignant at this, but kept our feelings to ourselves till we had the money in our hands. He called for the "keeper of the purse," who handed me four one-hundred notes and then began to count out ten-afghani notes. I was terrified that this would be less than another hundred, but he kept on until the whole 600 were in my hand. I then asked for the three horsemen to be summoned and gave them in his presence 200 afghanis each. He immediately asked for 50 back from each of them, but I put on the sternest face I could and forbade them to give him any notes. Although obviously taken aback, they sheltered behind our orders and got away without paying anything.

Feeling rather pleased at the success of our negotiations, we went down to bid farewell to the men, who were anxious to start off home up the valley. After much shaking of hands and many expressions of regret at parting they mounted their steeds and rode out of the stone enclosure and away. It was not till several hours later that we discovered that they had gone off with the polythene jerrycan containing four pints of paraffin; and we had missed, at Dasht-i-Revat the remaining enormous melon we had bought by the roadside the previous day. Such is gratitude!

We returned to our sleeping quarters up the hillside and made what conversation we could with our host, obviously a man of some importance. His cook brought in eggs swimming in mutton fat, and these he shared with us, following it with melon, for this was the time of the melon harvest. He showed no in-

clination to leave us or to go to sleep himself, so, when we could keep our eyes open no longer, we put the two mattresses side by side in one half of the room and lay down to seek sleep. He must have gone during the night, but he was with us again early the next morning, bringing a villager to shave him! He said he could arrange for a jeep to take us to Kabul, for 600 afghanis. We were not sure whether this was on the orders of Kabul or not, but felt that we had better accept the offer at what seemed a very reasonable price. We therefore arranged to be ready at 9 A.M., but, of course, there was the usual delay and at ten o'clock we found ourselves on the road in a jeep packed to capacity—with us, our luggage, three men, and one other woman! We shared the driver's seat, presumably because we were paying for the jeep, and the men sat on the luggage. The woman, veil drawn completely over her face, lay in a corner moaning at each lurch of the wheels as they bumped in and out of hollows and ruts.

An hour later we met a vehicle coming towards us—the Tourist jeep from Kabul! There had evidently been some misunderstanding, or else the Zenēh headman had deliberately sent us off with a friend of his, hoping, no doubt, to share the profits. Anyway, it was no fault of ours, so we 'sat tight' and let them argue it out. They finally decided to drive on to the next village and submit to arbitration. Luckily the governor here could speak English, and we were able to tell him the whole story. After hearing the other two versions he told us to remain in the jeep that had brought us and to explain at the Tourist Office on arrival in Kabul. All were satisfied, and we were ready to press on again, but first we had to have food and drink.

The men disappeared and we wandered up the village street past little open shops selling food, hardware, and cloth. Seeing a chaikhana full of men, we went inside and asked for chai. The proprietor was most attentive, and kept the children, drawn to us as by a magnet, at bay. Perhaps he doubled his takings, for more and more people dropped in to look at us and did not go away without a cup of tea. *Perhaps* it was not just politeness towards the stranger that made him wave our proffered coins aside when it came to paying for the tea, but it was pleasant for us.

The rest of the journey was uneventful, and we drew up at the



Kabul Hotel early in the afternoon. Before we left the city in August, we had booked a room for October 1, but were three days earlier than that. It was difficult to protest, therefore, when the polite clerk said that they had no rooms. Most of our friends (in the British Embassy) had departed on leave, so we had to rely on our own resources. We learnt afterwards that all the rooms were occupied by a German Treasury delegation. We asked whether there was another hotel at which we could stay for a day or two, and were told that there was certainly a good hotel round the corner—the Old Kabul Hotel. This sounded all right, so we directed the jeep-driver to take us there. Our new lodging was literally just round the corner and, compared with the fine modern exterior of the New Kabul, looked very cheap and second-rate. However, we were not in a position to be fussy, and in any case our appearance was probably more in keeping with this hotel! The proprietor said he had a room we could have, but no cooked meals were served on the premises. This seemed of little account just then, so we asked for our sacks and boxes to be unloaded and carried into the hotel. Luckily the room was big and sparsely furnished, and was to provide good space in which to re-sort the luggage. There was a wash-room next door, but only cold water; however, we were told that if we gave the porter money to buy wood he would light a fire in a bathroom upstairs.

Left to ourselves we sat on the two beds, feeling a little deflated; adventure was left behind and the sordid poverty of an Eastern city surrounded us. Fortunately we were self-sufficient as far as food was concerned, but we had looked forward to a change of diet and the luxury of daily baths. We comforted ourselves by saying that we would have the occasional meal at the New Kabul Restaurant whatever it cost. Fate, however, willed otherwise! When we presented ourselves the next day at the hotel in our cleanest clothes we were certainly bowed in and provided with an excellent meal, but at the same time were informed that from that time onward the restaurant would be closed to outsiders as the whole hotel would be at the disposal of the German Treasury mission! There was nowhere else that we could obtain European food in Kabul, or even Afghan food that we could be sure would not upset us, so we were reduced

once more to cooking on the stove and eating up the biscuits, of which we had still a good store. At our request a boy went out and brought back one of the huge melons displayed at stalls in the streets, and I was rash enough to eat large slices at every meal. This resulted in the usual tummy upset, and for two days I had strength for nothing.

A letter from England informed me that an American friend from Los Angeles was one of a Columbia team now in Kabul helping with Afghan education. I immediately rang the American Embassy, only to find that she had been sent to Kandahar to teach English to the men being trained as pilots and ground staff at Ariana Airlines, run jointly with Pan-American. I did not pursue the matter further, as our stay in Kabul was to be so short, but two days later there was a knock on our bedroom door and, to my amazement, there stood Ivalou, my old friend from California, who, hearing of my arrival in the capital, had flown the three hundred miles to see me! She was staying with an American co-worker who had been allocated a house and garden, in view of her long term of work in Kabul, helping with the teaching of domestic science. Seeing the poverty of our surroundings, she swept us off there for meals and a bath. The kindness of these two Americans, so typical of their nation, made life bearable in a city as yet in no way geared for the reception of tourists.

We went sightseeing with her, and, among other things, visited the Museum, where we saw the relics that had recently been found by archæological survey parties. A number of nations seem to have become interested recently in this research into the distant past of Afghanistan; French, Italian, and German expeditions have contributed much, and a comprehensive work has recently been published on the findings of the Danish expedition under Prince Peter. We were conducted round the principal room in a party of five, and subsequent conversation revealed that the other members of the group—Japanese—were two of a team of mountaineers who had just returned from a successful attempt on Nushak, a peak of over 23,000 feet in Nuristan. We were naturally keen to hear about their experiences, as they were about ours, and we made a rendezvous at our hotel for the following morning.

Twice more we had dinner with our American friends, and met several other interesting people, all engaged on the task of helping with education and the social services in Afghanistan. It seemed to us all wrong that the Americans, and not the British, should be teaching English to the Afghans!

We planned to leave Kabul as soon as possible. The transport of our numerous pieces of luggage was the main problem. This was in the end solved through the kindness of the Pakistan Embassy, approached *via* the British Embassy. Their van was due to take a party of Pakistanis back to Peshawar on October 3, and we were offered places in the bus and space for our luggage on top. Fortunately it was not until the van drew up at four o'clock in the morning that they were made aware of the odd shapes and weight of our bundles!



*Trying to cut Red Tape in Rawalpindi*

WE certainly owed the Pakistan Embassy a debt for their kindness in taking us, and so much baggage, on the near-200-mile journey to Peshawar. It was not only the great saving in the cost of transport—which really amounted to a very considerable gift—but the kindness which was shown to us in this way, and which was a foretaste of the very friendly feeling of the Pakistanis for the British in general, and for us in particular—which was so much appreciated. Their bus-cum-lorry, indeed, had made an additional journey to our hotel the night before, to try to collect our twenty-seven pieces of luggage, stores, and equipment; but we were out.

When we finally departed from Kabul we found that the “four families” of Pakistanis we had been told would nearly fill the available space for passengers, amounted to about ten others besides our two selves, and included three or four children; but, compared with our lorry from Djolfa to Tabriz, this was positively luxurious!

We had been told to be ready between 3.30 and 4 A.M. on October 3; actually, when all our baggage was loaded, we left about 4.15 A.M. For this slight delay I was very thankful, for, by being later, when we reached the long Kabul Gorge it was almost light. It is one of the most spectacularly wild and impressive bits of scenery in a country abounding in such scenes. The Kabul river, on which Kabul itself stands, runs through the capital, dirty and sluggish-looking and, certainly in the hot weather, evil-smelling. In the Gorge, and, indeed, long before reaching it, the river becomes very lovely. At the Gorge itself turbulent rapids tear down through fantastic rock: truly exciting to see. The lorry stopped for us to get out and admire this savage magnificence.

On our return from the Hindu Kush to Kabul we had been told at the British Embassy (where the Ambassador and most of

our friends had gone to England) that two things had happened in our absence: there was an outbreak of cholera in Kabul (we had known this had been serious in Pakistan—Lahore in particular), and there was now conscription, after further trouble on the Pakistan frontier. So, as a result of the former, we were stopped, about two hours after leaving Kabul, at a special check-point to show our vaccination certificates. Not long after this we stopped again, and this time it was for refreshment, generously paid for by our driver, in one of the tiny groups of 'houses' (stone huts, chiefly) scattered sparsely along our route, which, in spite of the river to the left, was mostly through arid land, with wild, bare mountains behind. Near the river itself there would be cultivation. Elsewhere the chief vegetation was the varied, often extremely tall, grasses for which Afghanistan is noted. Many of them are very beautiful, feathery and delicate-looking, often with strange and sometimes brightly coloured flowers.

We reached Jalalabad, where there is a good deal of rebuilding in progress, about 9.15 A.M., and we drove into the lovely shady gardens of the Pakistan Consulate (built by the British and formerly their Consulate). Here we relaxed under vast old "pepal-trees," as they called them, and had quite a long rest before we continued on our road, and after about an hour had our passports taken away to some check-point.

Shortly before we reached the frontier the lorry, which had been having trouble, had to halt for a long time for repairs. This was fortunately at a Control headquarters, so we were able to find a little shelter in the garden, from the sun, which was very strong. Actually we were only a quarter of an hour's run to Torkham, which we reached at 11.30 A.M. Fortunately we had no difficulties during the formalities there, or later. The journey on a good road, thirty-five miles from there through the Khyber Pass and the Plain of Peshawar, to Peshawar itself was naturally of great interest—historical as well as geographical.

The famous Pass, as a pass, is perhaps a little disappointing, because for those very reasons one expects too much, and the excellent road for modern traffic has perhaps shorn it of some of its 'romance'—rather grim romance in past days. Its width too,

at times, makes one forget that one is in a pass at all. (Probably we were a little spoilt, too, by the vivid memories of the Anjuman Pass!) It is, of course, very fine, wild scenery.

Peshawar, which we reached about four o'clock, is a teeming city. Yet, as usual in Pakistan and India, one soon finds plenty of evidence of the British Raj or Occupation (whichever way it strikes you!) in fine buildings and beautifully laid-out streets and avenues, and, of course, most of all, in British names of roads and the English language almost everywhere. In one of these avenues we eventually came to rest in a typical hotel with its terrace of little private bungalows.

Next morning, as on arrival, we had spent a good deal of time with Mr Gai, Agent to the Diplomatic Corps, Kabul. He was to deal with all baggage for which we had no further use on our last wanderings, and eventually to get it back to England. He spoke English perfectly: when Joyce had written from England to him she had doubted whether he would understand her letter!

Our next visit was to a British mission-hospital (of which the Embassy in Kabul had told us), to give them many medical supplies which would be superfluous for us to carry around any farther. They are, indeed, doing a labour of love at any hospital in the subcontinent—for the need can hardly be estimated at all.

We were to make for Rawalpindi as soon as possible, to get the endorsement of our permit to go to the State of Hunza, for we hoped that we might get further climbing in the Karakoram. Various kitbags and boxes and equipment were loaded on to an ox-wagon, and we and it made for the railway-station after midday—but the train had gone (Joyce's reliable watch had stopped!). This was fortunate, for we greatly enjoyed the 105-mile journey by road. Transport in Pakistan is good and cheap. We stopped at Nowshera, and finally crossed the Indus river at Attock Bridge—scene, we were told, of many and bloody battles. The Indus at times looks like the sea itself, with great sandy shores stretching as far as eye can see. Our last stops were at Hetti and Hasan Abad, and we finally arrived in what is becoming Pakistan's new capital, in part—Rawalpindi—at about six o'clock.



After a few efforts and wanderings we finally settled at "Mrs Davies' Hotel," surely an echo from the days of British India; we could not find out who she was, but we could think of a dozen stories about Mrs Davies! The hotel is in very pleasant grounds, occupying land bordered on three sides by wide avenues; it followed the usual pattern (in Victorian-style buildings) of personal bungalows. Mine host was a gracious old gentleman (or probably not as old as his venerable beard suggested) who had had to leave his former possessions, at Partition—so frequent a story in India and Pakistan—but, as he said, it was good to be still alive (as was invariably added). That night we had torrential rain, the first we had really noticed (since Moscow!), and then a thunderstorm went on most of the night—a different kind of 'wild weather' from that on Mir Samir.

Our very first commitment next morning was to get to the Ministry of Kashmiri Affairs, and try to procure the necessary further permission-on-the-spot for our proposed journey to Hunza. The headquarters was very beautifully situated in lovely grounds approached by a long drive. I found myself wondering what *that* building had been in British days. If ever a locality spoke of the days of gracious living in a foreign country—before two world wars (not to mention Partition) had shattered the very phrase, in its old sense—it is the 'British part' of Rawalpindi. Again I seemed to hear childhood stories from relations and friends once known as Anglo-Indians (Britons with all their roots in India—not the present-day connotation, once signified by the word 'Eurasian'). Certainly the subcontinent has been left a fine inheritance, and many members of it are aware and appreciative of that heritage and the traditions that go with it.

We had occasion to visit the General Headquarters in the Cantonment, with an introduction to a British Brigadier. (There are a number of Britons and members of the Commonwealth assisting in the building up of the Pakistan Army.) He had left, along with others, but when there, and moving round on our quest, we were greatly impressed by the smartness and efficiency of the troops and their officers, at the Victoria Barracks and elsewhere. One Pakistani Army officer we met on a later journey said proudly, "We have built up our Army from

where the British left off. I have been at Quetta; our Staff College there is as fine now as it was in the British day." This was sincere and factual—a pleasant change from those *Britons* who themselves belittle our own past, drag down our present, and, indeed, suggest that we have no future. My only sad foreboding was when I thought of the Afghan conscripts. In the event of any more serious frontier clash the Afghan would doubtless fight like a fiend—as a guerilla—but he would be no match for the modern armour we saw now; presumably another Power would hurry in to help.

We had hoped that the missing Brigadier would be able to urge things on for us. We had left the Ministry, little further forward. Joyce had already written to them, before arriving in Rawalpindi, but they seemed very vague about that; even if we had permission from London, that meant nothing to them, and we had to begin at the beginning and fill up forms. Then we interviewed a succession of officials; a young one said it would take a month to get a permit—if not longer. We finally got an elderly one who said he would try to do something "immediately"—but that did not help us for *that* day. So we amused ourselves in the ancient bazaar, far from our British-named avenues. (They seem *proud* to keep the names of our Field-Marsals, and so on!)

Meantime we had had a suggestion made that we should see the British Representative in Rawalpindi, from the Embassy, still in Karachi, so the next day we sought him out, or tried to do so, but not until we had been sent to the British *Council* by mistake. It did give us the opportunity of seeing their very good library—but books were not our immediate need! We eventually got to the right place—and the Representative was on leave! However, we saw a deputy, who was little help, although we did get the information that, as Britons, we needed no permit to go to Kashmir, ultimately. But he did confirm that we must travel south first, a total of nearly 500 miles—instead of crossing direct from Pakistan—as short a distance as 45 miles, to Srinagar, Kashmir's capital. It is sad that strained relations make things awkward for the third party, when that third party has no ill-will to either side in a dispute.

Another day had passed; the Ministry had said that the following day might bring news—to call early. This we did. They were really getting busy because of our importunity! They had not only sent a telegram to Karachi; they had sent a “wireless message”; and our case was being considered. We must return the next day; we gave up trying to anticipate the answer.

Saturday, October 8, saw our hopes, which, it must be admitted, had dwindled, extinguished finally. There was an absolute Ban on our setting foot in Hunza. We saw all the former officials; they even suggested that we could wait and see the head of the Ministry, in Rawalpindi—but it would make no difference, as he was bound by his orders from Karachi!

We realized that this was no caprice; there was no appeal. We had used every possible argument before; now, to satisfy ourselves somewhat, we fired all the questions possible at them, to know *why* there was this disappointing decision taken against two members of the Commonwealth, of which *they* were such staunch supporters themselves. We had heard that not long before our request there had been two different climbing expeditions, both with fatalities—a Belgian woman and an Englishman. Could it be our personal safety—two women alone, with no men in the party—that was their worry? That would have been irritating, perhaps even a little insulting; but we were soon reassured on this point. It *was* political; “things” were happening.

I realized that we were running this particular official, who had done his best for us, into a corner. We might even make him admit to something, in dereliction of his duty, which he had no right to tell. His final remark, uttered rather desperately, convinced *me* anyhow—and, I think, Joyce—for I had heard it almost word for word before, from *British* officials abroad in administrative positions: “London does *not* always know just what is happening *on the spot*.” How true! We badgered him no more. We had had to make new plans before, and we certainly had no reason to quarrel with the results. We would put our whole minds to a different plan of action; we would concentrate on getting into the Gilgit Agency, anyhow.

Our helpful official said we could have a permit at once for this and Skardu. He offered suggestions for our best methods of travel, and got the necessary forms for us to fill up. We lost not a minute after that in trying to put our latest project in motion. We went straight off to try to book places on a plane to Gilgit itself, to make up for all the time lost in hanging about.

We had our first setback; we were getting used to 'taking it.' There was not a chance of a plane for days, and all seats were fully booked for well ahead. I am glad we did not get that plane! For we proved again the endless interest, human and otherwise, of a journey on the ground. More time necessary, yes; but, after all, we were not off to do a business deal; our only real fixture was Srinagar, Kashmir's capital, by October 19.

We had now to go by stages: we did not know we were to end with the wildest jeep rides of our lives: ending the trips, but not our lives! We began by going to the appropriate bus station, and booking seats for Abbottabad. That more than three-hour run, not on a first-class road, had not a dull moment. Through Taxila, with its ancient remains and diggings, to the busy places where we stopped, as usual we were the only foreigners.

There were the women in their clumsy, airless-looking, heavy cotton chaudris, who actually ate and drank tea, underneath their 'veils.' There was an Army officer who gave us tea; and many others. But sad and haunting to me still is the face of a young Pakistani, hardly more than a boy; unshaven, *very* ragged, he was handcuffed, and chained to an Army sergeant, and there was a second guard. In public transport—they seemed to excite *no* interest. (Pakistan, in any case, has a comparatively mild form of martial law.) He may have been a deserter; he certainly had not the look of a hardened or desperate criminal; his wrists in the heavy 'bracelets' were slim as a girl's, and the sensitive hands were the only bit of him that ever seemed to move. It was the hunted look in his eyes, which were like those of a deer; it never left them. The soldiers alighted for tea in a little café at Haripur. They sat talking at a table near us and our officer companion; the boy was staring unseeingly



out of the window the whole time. What were his thoughts? He might have been carved in stone. I could not take my eyes off the little group, though I tried not to seem to be looking that way. Here was just some tragedy—big or small—of which I should never know either the beginning or the end. It was just—life.

*The Gilgit Agency and Kashmir*

**A**BBOTTABAD, the hill station set on a plateau 4,000 feet above sea-level, was created by Mr Abbott, a District Commissioner in the ample days of the British Raj. It undoubtedly fulfilled his desire for a place within easy reach of Rawalpindi which was high enough to be cool in summer; where woods offered welcome shade at all times, and where the soil was sufficiently fertile to produce luscious fruit and vegetables. As we stepped down from the bus on arrival from Rawalpindi we expanded our lungs to the full, to take in the invigorating, dust-free air.

On the advice of the Army officer who had travelled with us and given us tea *en route*, we went straight to the Spring Field Hotel to book a room for the night, but were disappointed to find that no evening meals could be provided. We therefore made a virtue of necessity and explored the town while seeking a restaurant. We walked along the tree-lined avenue in which the hotel was situated, then took a turning at right angles till we came to the main street of the town running parallel with the avenue at a higher level. No shops were open at this hour, but men and women thronged the streets, laughing and chattering. We hesitated outside a Pakistani restaurant, lit up with a string of coloured lights, but feared the peppery food; passed by an Iranian café because of the loudspeakers blaring forth, and finally pulled up at the Palace Hotel, a pretentious building approached by a curving drive leading to a covered veranda. Our request for dinner was met with some surprise, but in the end we were graciously allowed to have a meal in the large, empty dining-room. The main dish was, after all, curry, which we were seeking to avoid, but, since there was no alternative and we were tired of walking the streets, we ate it and the rather sloppy jelly that followed it. On the way back we inquired about transport for the continuance of our journey, and found

that we should have to take the public service bus at 8.30 A.M. to Balakot, and go on from there by jeep.

Eleanor woke up in the night with good reason to regret that she had eaten spicy food once more! As, however, the worst effects were over by morning, we decided to carry on with our plans. We were at the bus station soon after eight, but, alas! we had been misinformed and the bus had already gone. We found that there was not another till the late afternoon, but while we were wondering what to do the driver of a bus standing in the yard came up and spoke to us in good English. We were surprised at his build and appearance—more Afghan than Pakistani—and the light colour of his skin. On hearing our dilemma he suggested that we got into his bus, which was going along the same route, but not to our destination; he would, he said, increase his speed so as to catch up the earlier bus at Manshera, its first stop. We were glad to avail ourselves of his friendly offer and mounted his bus. He waited for no one else, but set off at full speed, whizzing past the famous Abbottabad Boys' School and the turning for the Military Academy and on out of the town along a narrow mountain road. We were at Manshera in less than an hour, and, to our relief, found the first bus still there, but inquiry revealed that there were no vacant places. There was, however, another possibility—a 'taxi-bus' left two hours later from a near-by yard. Our driver gave us tea in the room reserved for employees and arranged for a coolie to take our luggage to the next vehicle. This turned out to be a small, privately owned bus in which we waited with eighteen other passengers till the driver arrived and elected to start.

After a slow journey on which we picked up and set down passengers at every village on the route we eventually got to Balakot at 2 P.M. The bus stopped outside the garage, and before we had time to get out little boys were competing to carry our bags. The driver selected two and instructed them to take us to the dak bungalow. This was a large white bungalow set well back from the road with a separate smaller building for staff and kitchen. We were greeted by a grinning boy speaking no English, and shown into a room. This, as is usual in this type of accommodation, was large and airy and furnished with two charpoys (bedsteads of wooden frames with string webbing), a

table, and two chairs. A door at the far end led to the wash-room (which boasted running water).

After a cup of tea we went to the garage to inquire about a jeep. The proprietor said he only arranged for private jeeps, and a journey to Gilgit would cost 700 rupees (almost £50). This was more than we felt we could afford, so we made inquiries at the office bearing the legend "Govt. Transport Agency." The man in charge here told us that there was a public jeep service during the summer months, but this had by now ceased to operate. In the course of half an hour's conversation, however, he mellowed considerably, and said that he had another prospective customer for a village on the route and agreed to arrange for us to travel that far; he thought we might pick up another jeep there. The journey to Naran, the village in question, would cost only 17 rupees for the two of us and our luggage, a price that would have been cheap on a flat metalled road. We departed munching walnuts, a plateful of which he had given us (shelled), from the sacks recently brought down from Naran.

Satisfied that we had done all we could, we walked down the narrow beaten-earth road that led to the river. It was lined on both sides with little open-fronted shops selling grain and spices of all sorts, vegetables, baskets, pots and pans, and clothes of poor quality, but some very beautiful blankets. On the bridge over the river a little boy attached himself to us and would not be shaken off. We followed him along a path skirting the river, passing by humble dwellings and cultivated fields, until it grew too dark to see ahead and we retraced our steps. On the way back one or two other children joined our self-appointed guide, then more and more, shouting and screaming, till we felt like the Pied Piper. Obviously we were objects the like of which they had never seen before. At the bridge a storekeeper spoke to them in threatening tones, and they dispersed, leaving us to continue our way up the street and back to the bungalow.

The flickering light of an oil-lamp with a broken mantle did not encourage reading or writing, so we went to bed early and were up in good time for the jeep due to start at 6.30. We paid the modest sum of 7 rupees demanded for food and lodging, and went down to the garage. There were now three other passengers,



so a trailer had to be attached to the jeep to take the luggage. Our companions of the ride were a sailor, a salesman selling tea in the villages on the route, and an older man whose occupation we did not learn. The sailor was on leave and, having heard of the beauty of the Kaghan Valley, was taking this ride to see it for himself. The driver was a big, cheerful man with a thick black beard whose expert driving gave us confidence that we should reach our destination alive in spite of the curves round which we lurched and the precipitous drops at the edge of the narrow track along which we crept. The road had been well engineered in the first place by the British, but there were now many weak places, and the edge seemed always most broken above the most spectacular drops. As the construction allowed for the passage of only one vehicle at a time, a one-way system had been installed: everything going up had to arrive by midday at an appointed place and drive off the road into an enclosure set aside for this purpose. Only when the down traffic had ceased to flow could the upstream of vehicles continue their journey.

Our jeep arrived in good time, so that we were able to get out and wander by the river-bank. We were high up above swiftly running water whirled into eddies by the projecting rocks of the bed. Ahead and around rose peaks up to about 14,000 feet, their sides covered with firs, above which rose summits of rock and snow. At the appointed time we resumed our journey through the spectacular valley, along a track engineered in the mountain-side high up above the stream. We stopped at the little village of Paras for tea and buttery chupatties, as guests of the driver, and again farther on for tea and boiled eggs, as guests of the tea salesman.

On arrival in Naran we found that no traffic was going beyond the village that day, so we settled in the Government Rest House to await developments. It was on the verge of closing for the season, but we were allowed to sleep there, providing our own meals. There was only one other guest, a Canadian, working on a dam (under the Colombo Plan), and his cook provided us from time to time with tea and eggs.

It was incredible to me that so beautiful a valley could contain so ugly a village. The soil was most infertile, and before

anything could be grown stones and rocks had to be collected into piles to leave space to sow seeds. Grey stone houses were indistinguishable from the background of grey stones and earth of this colourless village. The one street climbing steadily uphill was lined with wooden shacks displaying various sorts of grain and spices and a few miserable vegetables. We tried to buy eggs, and had to buy two at one shop and one at another—all the village could produce. One old man sat making magenta sandals all day long, and another made metal jewellery, which, when burnt over a charcoal fire, and subsequently plunged into ice-cold water and rubbed with a white powder, resembled silver. A tailor embroidered black cloth by machine, and a chaikhana did good trade with little china bowls of tea. The few people in the street were obviously too poor to spend more than an anna or two at a time. They were very thin, of short stature, their faces brown, and their black hair unkempt. Another Canadian we met later, also working under the Colombo Plan, told us that the villagers of the whole valley were unusually primitive and believed in devils and spirits. He had been to a wedding in Naran and seen for himself.

Beyond the shops the track continued to follow the river, almost empty of water at this season, supplied by little streams which trickled down from high peaks clothed in firs and pines to the very summit, except in a few cases, where snow still lingered. During the two days in which we waited hopefully for a jeep to arrive, which would take us farther on, we explored these hills and found them very beautiful. But the few jeeps that came were always full of goods, with no room for passengers. We should have liked to go as far as the Babusar Pass, so as to get good views of the surrounding country, but even this was impossible. The Canadian told us that the Pass would be closed on October 15, so that, even if we got there, we should have little chance of going over the Pass, and might have considerable difficulty in getting back. We finally regretfully resigned ourselves to the fact that we should not get to Gilgit or Babusar, and decided to return to Rawalpindi and try to *fly* to Gilgit from there. On the fourth day of our stay we took advantage of the arrival of another public-transport jeep from Balakot to go back in it.

We had a Jehu for a driver, and had a most uncomfortable journey. It was very cold in the open-sided vehicle; its iron rail bruised our sides, and the constant swinging and shaking round corners and hairpin bends made me feel sick. I was glad, therefore, to see Balakot again and, after a night there, to catch the early-morning bus down the valley back to Abbottabad.

We decided to take in Murree on the way, a hill station very popular with the British before Partition, but although we reached Abbottabad by 10.30 A.M., the only bus on that route had already gone. As we stood in the bus station considering our next move, to our great delight the friendly bus-driver of our previous visit appeared and got us out of another difficulty. He said that we ought certainly to see Murree, and Nathia Gali, a little village 9000 feet up and so remote that monkeys and tigers still lived in the forests around. He himself was driving a bus to Nathia Gali that evening, and would like us to go with him and spend the night there as his guest. We hesitated because we did not want to miss a plane to Gilgit from Rawalpindi, so he suggested that we should telephone from there and reserve seats. The Transport Manager kindly did this for us without charge, and found out that there was no available seat on a plane for a week. This put the decision out of our hands, and we felt that fate evidently intended us to see Nathia Gali and Murree.

At 4.30 P.M. we set off on another spectacular drive, on a road with a very bad surface which wound up a mountain-side in well-engineered curves. Men were at work repairing it and many times we had to wait while the road was cleared of men and debris. The gradient was in places 1 in 5, so that often we crawled along at only five miles an hour. As a result the journey of twenty miles took two hours to accomplish, and it was dark when at the top of a steep pull-up we arrived at a collection of half a dozen wooden buildings standing out against a roseate sunset—Nathia Gali.

The bus was to stay here for the night, so all the passengers descended and our friend the driver took us down a steep incline to the "home of his friend." The friend was away (so they said), and we were shown into a room obviously occupied by some one else. There were two beds up against the walls, and

a table littered with personal belongings stood in the middle of the floor. The room was hastily cleared up, the bedding removed and tea brought in. We laid our sleeping-bags out on the bedsteads and were thinking of sleep when the driver came in. He was in a mood for conversation, and we learnt that his name was Mohammed D. Amire (Durrani). Durrani is an Afghan Royal Dynasty, and Mohammed's grandfather had fled over the frontier as a political exile from Kabul. We had often wondered at his distinguished appearance and his features, so unlike his fellow-workers, and this explained it! He was highly intelligent and told us that he had learnt his English from clients whom he had taken on tours in taxis. He was anxious for every opportunity to practise speaking, for he had great hopes of visiting England one day. He told us that he had to drive his bus back to Abbottabad very early the next morning, but had given instructions that we were to be well looked after and had already paid the bill.

On his departure we prepared for bed. Washing was a little difficult as we had to go out into the lane, into the building by another entrance and through three occupied rooms, before reaching the common wash-room. In this room we found enamel bowls and a bucket of cold water. Food had to be brought from a neighbouring shop, so we gave our order for breakfast and then lay down to sleep.

The next morning at 11 A.M. our friend picked us up in his bus for the journey to Murree, about twenty miles away. The road was cut through the forest, and though we saw not even the tail of a monkey we were assured that whole colonies lived there, and tigers and jackals had been seen. The journey was again slow because of the extensive reconstruction being undertaken, but we did not mind, for this gave us time to appreciate the delightful scenery. At last we saw Murree nestling among trees on the southern slope of a fir-clad hill.

On arrival in what appeared to be a very civilized little town we were surrounded by coolies all clamouring to carry our luggage. The head porter arranged for us to be conducted to the Lockwood Hotel, ten minutes' walk away up a steep hillside. This hotel, originally run by British for the British, is now in the hands of a Pakistani, a lawyer by profession, who keeps up the



British traditions and standards. We were taken to a suite of comfortably furnished rooms—sitting-room, bedroom, large veranda, and two bathrooms without running water. The price was 32 rupees (48s.) per day for food and lodging, but evidently it was a fixed tariff, for two. Moreover, after eight days of making do, it really was good to be waited on hand and foot, to steep in limitless hot water which they brought to us, to wash all our clothes, and to eat meals that we had not cooked ourselves.

A walk round the town showed that it set itself out to cater for tourists, and, although it was rather empty at this time of the year, it was obvious that the shops expected many customers at the height of the season. The cool air would attract many from Rawalpindi and the plains: we had four blankets on our beds that night for the first time since leaving England! Paths with easy gradients had been made in the surrounding woods, and good views were obtained from strategically placed look-outs. We even obtained a good, if misty, view of the Himalayas. Horses and ponies waited patiently in the square to carry those who wanted to go farther up the hills; while cinemas, dance-halls, and restaurants catered for the less energetic.

We could have enjoyed several days here, but time was running out and we had to get back to Rawalpindi the next day. On arrival we took a taxi to Mrs Davies' Hotel (our third visit), where we were welcomed as old friends, but this time our stay had to be short—just sufficient for the preparations necessary for the next stage of the journey to Kashmir.

At Rawalpindi a fine road runs into Kashmir to Srinagar, only 90 miles away; but it is closed because of frontier difficulties and we had to travel nearly five hundred miles to keep the rendezvous for October 19, which I had made with my husband before leaving England. I was not sure whether he could keep to the arrangement, for we had had no mail from England since leaving Kabul, but I felt it a matter of conscience that I should arrive on time. Fortunately we had five days to make the journey.

Working feverishly, we divided our remaining belongings into two heaps—those we should want in Srinagar and later, and those we could now dispense with and send back to England. I managed to get everything into a rucksack and grip,

for my 'party' clothes would, I hoped, arrive with my husband; but Eleanor had to have a kitbag as well, for the things she would require not only in India, but on the boat going home, when it might be cold again.

We had four packages for England—three kit-bags and the tents sewn into a sack—and these we could now send to Mr Gai at Peshawar, as arranged when we were there. We took them in a taxi to the station, but, to our dismay, we found that the parcels office shut at 4 P.M. However, a kindly official working late said that he would see after them for us, though it was against the rules! We filled in the required forms and asked if it was necessary to insure the packages. He looked at them and said they were so well packed that this was unnecessary. (Of course we could have lost the whole package.) Feeling less encumbered than we had done for months, we returned to spend the last night at Mrs Davies' Hotel, really sorry to leave this pleasant house and its friendly, efficient staff.

We left early the next morning, travelling third class on an express train bound for Karachi, which stopped at Lahore. We had tickets entitling us to seats, and found them to be in a "Ladies Only" compartment. This, to begin with, was not over-full, and the slatted wooden seats were made for coolness. A young Pakistani woman in graceful dress, whose father was seeing her off, told us that she was a graduate of Karachi University and was now employed by a firm for testing wool. She had come up to Rawalpindi to leave her two small children with their grandparents so that they could be looked after better, for her husband was employed in East Pakistan. The rest of the travellers were mothers with numerous children, but all were quite well behaved. The train went fast to Jhelum, where there was quite a long stop and we were able to get tea from the vendors who drew their trolleys up to the train. A few extra people got in here and at other stations on the way, so that by the time we arrived at Lahore the compartment was crammed to capacity, many women who could not get seats squatting on the floor or sitting on their suitcases. What a variety of types there were! I noticed particularly a young girl with smooth black pigtails with her baby, sister, and mother; she looked very attractive, but far too young to be married! Then there was a

flat-featured Mongolian-type woman, who could speak no language known to the other occupants of the carriage, nursing a very fat docile boy of about three. A superior lady sitting opposite me from time to time drew out from under her seat a box, the size of a vanity case. From it she extracted a leaf and made a choice from among the coloured pastes in the little divisions of the box, to spread on it, afterwards eating it with obvious enjoyment. Her three children stood by the windows until a lurch of the train sent one sprawling, cracking open his head quite seriously.

Fifty miles from Lahore a family of gipsies got in, headed by a brawny woman with brightly henna-ed hair. She literally fought her way to a place and pulled down the youngest boy beside her, although there was only one place vacant. When other passengers objected she rose in wrath and threatened to hit anyone who interfered with her child.

For 5 rupees (7s. 6d.) we travelled the 178 miles from Rawalpindi to Lahore, in just over six hours, and saw much of interest on the way. The country all along was flat and fertile, and we crossed three branches of the Indus, in whose waters buffaloes and little boys submerged themselves to escape the terrific heat of the afternoon sun. We saw many interesting water-fowl too, some of them unknown to us, but we noted the flight of herons, kingfishers, and parakeets.

When the train pulled up in Lahore station a crowd of coolies invaded the already full compartment and pulled down luggage from the racks. Those who were trying to get out found their way jammed by these men, who handed luggage over people's heads from one man to the next. We could only sit still and hope that order would be restored before the train left the station again. But when two of our pieces were seized by coolies we had perforce to fight our way out too, and we were astonished to find after another five minutes that both we and our luggage were safely on the platform. Two red-coated coolies conducted us out of the station to the large Braganza Hotel just opposite, to which we had been recommended: another excellent hotel but rather more expensive this time. After tea we walked the length of the adjacent streets, and were horrified at the dirt, poverty, and disease we saw. Lahore is an old city, but we did not have the

time to visit her many historic monuments, although next morning we did see some of her banks and offices and the cathedral.

We took the midday bus for Amritsar, a distance of about 30 miles, but the passage took three and a half hours, for we had the frontier formalities to contend with. A mile from the Pakistan frontier we had to get out of the bus and walk to the various offices along the road, our luggage being carried on the heads of coolies. First there was the passport examination, then the Customs, then the currency, and when we had crossed the frontier all this had to be repeated on the Indian side. Here we ran into difficulties over money. We were told that we could take into India only 75 rupees each—even if we *had* been on an expedition. After much discussion and argument we were allowed to proceed. (Money left at the frontier, we were told, could be reclaimed on arrival in Delhi. Permission would have to be obtained from the Reserve Bank of India, who would issue an order: on receipt of this the Customs official would forward the money to any given address in Delhi.)

Feeling rather sore about this *contretemps*, we walked towards the Indian bus waiting to go on to Amritsar. A head coolie collected the dues for the transportation of the luggage, which was put on the bus by yet another set of urchins. These also demanded payment, and we handed them a few annas, which they handed back again in disdain for so small an amount. As we knew that this was the correct payment, we sat unmoved in the face of gesticulation and abuse till, thirty seconds before the departure of the bus, they held out their hands for anything, however small, that we might choose to give them!

An hour's run brought us to Amritsar, where we stayed in a very third-rate, though convenient, hotel. The barely furnished room was clean, but had no lock, although it was open to the veranda and so to the street. When we complained we were told quite politely that we could go and buy a padlock!

The early-morning bus crossed the Kashmir frontier before midday with the minimum of formality and with kindly interest from officials. At Jammu we had to make connexion with another bus for Srinagar, but we had missed the last departure for the day. However, through the kindness of the manager of a private bus company, who first had tea brought for us,



we were given seats in a charter bus taking a party of school-boys for their holidays. We were very relieved, as this would just allow us time to meet the afternoon plane at Srinagar on which my husband was due to arrive.

We left the plains behind and drove up beautiful wooded valleys, getting higher and higher, until we stopped for the night at a dak bungalow at Batote. Arrangements had been made for the boys to sleep there, but the unexpected presence of two ladies caused some embarrassment until the problem was solved by installing us in one of the staff rooms. The driver insisted on an early start the next morning and warned us to be ready at six o'clock. This was good news to us, for an early start was essential if we were to reach our destination in the early afternoon.

All the boys were out on the street by six o'clock, and the bed-rolls were piled on to the top of the bus. An hour later, as there was still no sign of the driver, we adjourned to the village chaikhana to drink tea and eat "bakakhuni," a light puff pastry, as the guests of the schoolmaster. Some of the boys set off walking along the route, and the rest of us had to wait till 9.15 A.M. before the driver appeared, not in the least perturbed that he had kept everybody waiting three hours: a relative in the village was ill, he said, and it would not have been proper to leave him earlier.

We now followed a steep and tortuous mountain road, so that there was no possibility of making up for lost time. At the highest point it entered a tunnel, still in the process of construction, and emerged two miles farther on, thus cutting off a considerable distance and height. From this elevation we descended to a wide plain with terraced fields interspersed with little villages of two-storey houses with thatched roofs. We had occasional glimpses of the river Jhelum, lined with house-boats and barges, before reaching Srinagar at 3.30 P.M.—zero hour!

The bus drew up in the courtyard of the Tourist Centre. This is a newly planned reception centre catering for the thousands of tourists that invade the town in the summer months. An office staff attends to transport and accommodation; a large restaurant feeds the itinerant population at all hours of the day,

and rooms on three sides of the site provide overnight accommodation.

At the reception desk I immediately made inquiries about the plane from Amritsar, and was told that it had arrived at the airport. "Is there a bus that brings the passengers here?" I asked. "Yes," the clerk replied, "but I don't think it has arrived yet. I will telephone and find out." He lifted the receiver, then put it down, pointing through the window. "There it is, just coming in."

In excitement and triumph I rushed outside and examined the passengers one by one as they alighted—no Peter! What a disappointment! What a triumph it would have been if we had both arrived at just that psychological moment! I heard afterwards the story of the frustrating delay at the Pakistan-India frontier, resulting in his missing the plane and having to wait twenty-four hours for the next flight.

Eleanor and I spent a comfortable night at the Tourist Centre, and on his arrival the next day we all transferred to the *Sheila Anne*, a *de luxe*-class house-boat, where we spent ten happy days, relaxing in the sun, marvelling, on the one hand, how easy and luxurious life could be in an Eastern city and realizing with sadness, on the other hand, how precarious and difficult life was for the majority of the population living in insanitary conditions on little boats or in houses overlooking the river. Our impression was that they looked back with regret on the days before Partition, when British families came up to Kashmir for the summer months, gave them employment, and bought their wares. This is the Paradise of the craftsman, for nothing is made by machine in Kashmir. We should have liked to buy many things; and Peter and I did bring back a treasure that will outlive us—a Kashmir rug woven in a low shed by a whole family. Father, sons, and nephews down to eight years of age sat on wooden benches on either side of a ten-foot loom and wove intricate patterns, on the instruction of the head of the family, who, reading from a scrap of brown paper pinned to the frame of the loom, called out instructions to each child, whose nimble fingers did the rest. The little factory was run on a friendly basis, payment being a matter of arrangement between the owner and the family. The workers fixed their own hours of work,

arranging, as good Muslims, that each member should go to the mosque five times a day, yet the loom should never be idle. Schooling for the children was arranged, for two years, between the ages of twelve and fourteen.

A visit to Gulmarg was disappointing, for, too obviously, the glory had departed and only empty cabins told of a former prosperity. But from this high point we did have a view of Nanga Parbat (26,660 feet), the peak we had missed seeing by not going to Gilgit.

A month in India rounded off a wonderful holiday. We had time to take in the scenery, absorb something of the culture, and meditate upon the problems of this land and its teeming millions. There was much to admire in the way the Indians were working to improve their country; yet I felt sorry for the beggars of India as I had never felt sorry for the penniless tribesmen of Afghanistan.

Peter and I flew back to London from Bombay in a jet plane, in 14 flying hours. The adventure was over, and, thinking of the words of the Pakistani we had met in the train to Teheran—"God has been *too* good to you English"—I was glad that I had a home to which to come back, in Abinger, England.

*Sundown*

OUR experiences, in the Kaghan valley; in the hill stations; travelling nearly 500 miles—by Lahore to Amritsar, in order to reach Srinagar in lovely Kashmir—were so different from our previous ones, and from each other, that one felt more and more that one had lived several lives in different worlds. Through the kind invitation of Joyce and her husband—he had come on a painting holiday in these beautiful surroundings—I had been their guest in the luxury houseboat on Dal Lake by Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir; and that for me was really a case of *dolce far niente*. I felt extremely well in health, the whole ten days we stayed in the *Sheila Anne*. Much as I enjoy ‘living rough’—if one must do so, in order to be with nature—it was pleasant to have a different sort of food, beautifully served; and even the roots of the lotus (which grows everywhere on the lake), cooked as a vegetable, did not have any ill-effects on me, as on the others!

Whatever the political situation in Kashmir, for climate and a softer kind of beauty it must be hard to beat, anywhere in the world. Unfortunately, I have no gifts as a painter; but it was a relaxation for me just to sit lazily in the *Shikara* (that long, gondola-like boat used for journeys from the houseboat) in some interesting surroundings, near cultivated ‘floating’ islands, tall houses—up to seven storeys, unique in Kashmir—or some ancient bridge, watching the painting of the scene, in water-colours. Such a hobby must be a complete change from Engineering and Science.

We should all meet again in New Delhi, where I should be in an International hostel (always a fascinating experience) almost in the city centre, and they in a hotel (where Dr Dunsheath was attending a conference) nearer the Diplomatic Enclave; but for speed they would fly there; I would take my time by road, and train later (for, like Afghanistan, Kashmir has no railways). On a long journey one can often marshal one’s thoughts and ideas



—apart from using one's eyes and ears—as one travels. I scarcely ever read when travelling.

I could visualize, once more, little scenes in that wild ride from Balakot to Naran (on the brink of thousand-foot precipices), and the wanderings we had from the latter; the kind actions of many people everywhere we went, generous to us, though owning so little of this world's goods; the distant, but very clear view of Nanga Parbat—still calling any mountaineer—the sunsets over Dal Lake and the Jelhum river; the mosques, and gardens; the terrible, grey desolation of the disastrous floods near Tanmarg; the brilliant green parakeets flying past the train on the crowded journey from Rawalpindi to Lahore: one's mind was like a kaleidoscope with colour, literal and symbolic. So, to travel again, in reverse, the road from Srinagar to Jammu, through the mountains and the great Balihal tunnel, and the lovely Vale of Kashmir, was a joy.

It was sad, however, but hardly surprising, to see that a serious accident had happened, and a truck, and its load of people, had overturned from the mountain road, over a precipice into a valley—with many injured, but, amazingly, not killed. The terraced lands, the paddy fields, the carpets of purple saffron-plants, the walnut-trees, the weird valleys with the candelabra cactus-tree; and in one place the many little monkeys, playful or pathetic-looking—watching all this, one hardly had time to think. But I remembered a prayer I had once heard at a public school (in England): “May we never lose the gift of Wonder.” However much one sees, one need *never* become blasé.

At Jammu I took the road to Pathankot, and thence night-train to Delhi. Our wild expedition was now well and truly behind us, but that did not mean that there was no more interest, or that all was ‘civilized’ once more.

India, with its millions of people, has vast problems. Many European countries have great poverty and suffering, but it is necessarily on a smaller scale. In spite of modern progress one cannot but be saddened by the fact of the difficulties of touching more than the fringe of problems almost daunting in their magnitude. Modern India is achieving much. It is not all misery that one sees. There is prosperity and kindness, as well as beg-

gary and thieving resulting from poverty. The old and wonderful buildings of the more remote past are of all the greater interest by contrast with the later ones—the many fine edifices left by the British and the modern ones on a large scale that India has added and is continuing to add.

To stand by the simple memorial to Gandhi, with its little flower-offerings reverently placed there, is as impressive in its way—or perhaps even more so—as to tread the places of ancient or modern splendours. I had a particular and personal sense of the link with past days, for my father had told me how he had met and talked with Gandhi in England; and through that I felt strangely a personal horror and shock when this great man (whether one agreed with him or not, he was that) was assassinated. It was therefore of all the greater interest to me that, through an odd chain of circumstances, I was to be most happily indebted, before I left India, to the “Elisha” on whom “the mantle of Elijah” had fallen—Mr Nehru. I shall always preserve a truly grateful memory of his personal kindness to me.

When Joyce and I had come down to Amritsar, in order to go northward again to Kashmir, having changed in Kabul all our remaining afghanis (and we had had to have much loose cash to pay our men, and for emergencies, ‘in the wilds’) into rupees—nearly all my worldly wealth, in *Indian* rupees (too many, unfortunately, but which I declared in all honesty at the frontier), was impounded. Joyce’s half of our balance had been changed into *Pak* rupees, which, of course, we had been using.

I did not seriously worry about it in Kashmir, because I had been told by a Customs official that I should get it back “in Delhi.” But this statement proved erroneous; and, very worried, I eventually prolonged my stay in Delhi—which had been darkened by this (to me) great loss—to batter my head still further against the brick wall of officialdom. Letters and visits here, there, and everywhere proved unavailing. British authorities did their best, but it was really an ‘internal affair’; until, desperate, I realized that the only thing was to go to the top, to the highest Authority. Through an English friend in Delhi and the very kind offices of a former Minister of Health in India (she is still a Member of Parliament)—Rajkumari Amrit Kaur—my letter was taken quickly to Mr Nehru.

It was a very happy moment in my life when I was telephoned by the Reserve Bank of India—less than an hour before I had to leave for Bombay—and heard the words: “Our Prime Minister has intervened on your behalf”—words worth all my worry and efforts. He had at once, I was told, got the Finance Minister, Mr Desai, to take up my case with the Bank: I was to have my rupees back.

The kind action was now worth far more to me than the money. The day I wrote my letter of gratitude to Mr Nehru was his seventy-first birthday. The trouble taken by the Head of a great State to help an unknown member of our mutual great Commonwealth of Nations was the crowning happiness of the most wonderful set of experiences—in quick succession over the past few months—of my life.

In Bombay I felt that one of my most instructive experiences was a visit to the fine buildings of the Oxford University Press. I had had a kind introduction from London to Mr R. E. Hawkins of that august body in Bombay. To see the obviously very great interest taken by the many Indians, the poorer as well as the more prosperous, in the splendid display of books, in that handsome place—browsing among some of Great Britain’s most outstanding literary works, beautifully produced—was quite inspiring. Such books are not cheap in money, and therefore it must often entail sacrifice in order to buy them.

Friendship between two countries—more especially when one was the ‘occupied’ and the other the ‘occupier,’ as many people nowadays like to describe the situation before 1947—is a triumph for *both* sides, showing magnanimity in each. How better can we understand one another, in every country—even if we can never manage or afford to travel far from our native land—than by the good books of the other country, which must show the heart and mind of that country.

The Taj Mahal, in Agra, in spite of its rare beauty, had left me sad, to think that life and labour could be so cheap. Modern India is building a better monument by its fight against ignorance and disease. What could not but impress me as a Briton was the gratitude with which was stressed, by many Indians, the generosity of the late Lord Curzon, India’s one-time Viceroy (the Marquess Curzon of Kedleston). The very beautiful

approach to the Taj had been of his making; the building too, I was told, might have fallen into decay but for him; and so, with many famous buildings, the "Father of Indian Archæology," as I frequently heard him called, is remembered with respect and gratitude by the India of to-day. His was the only Viceroy's name I ever heard mentioned as a *personal* thing, though the names of others can be seen often, on public buildings, statues, and streets; and doubtless they remain—in many good works, as do those of their sympathetic and public-spirited wives.

I made many happy contacts in Bombay, with people in different strata of society, and met with much kindness. It was indeed a case of 'two worlds,' to go to the island of Elephanta to see those giant sculptures, hewn out of the living rock so long ago, and then to see, so near, on Trombay, the huge atomic reactor. They can gaze on each other, not many miles apart.

I left Bombay on November 17, 1960, with a very full heart, but a much lighter one than I had felt in my early days of worry and distress in Delhi. Thus can *kindness* change a whole attitude to people, nay, to a whole country. It will be good when, as Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns, expresses it:

Man to man, the warl' o'er,  
Shall brithers be for a' that

Returning to England in a one-class ship, with passengers about evenly balanced in numbers, brown and white, proved to be a very enjoyable experience. Karachi, where I spent some hours, was very hot; but in Aden, the Dust Bowl, there was such a cold wind that I walked at great speed—nearly into the Yemen by mistake, as some one remarked.

Suez provided a hold-up, for a tragic reason; a tanker had leaked, a dredger caught fire, and people were burnt to death, we were told. The horrible black oil floating there was a hateful memorial. I had gone, before knowing this, to Cairo, by that narrow black ribbon of fine road stretching across the wide paleness of desert—with the curious white sandhills here and there in the background—for nearly a hundred miles. The Great Pyramid, although so utterly unlike it, and with the labour for it so different, gives one the same sort of feeling as the Taj Mahal. Life can be of no account. There is to me a very



sinister feeling in the interior of this unbelievable vastness and calculation of building, and, to add to this feeling, I was taken through it by an old Arab of seventy-five—totally blind—whose ‘fishy’ white eyes ‘saw’ nothing, but whose fast-moving hands touched every bit of stone as he approached it. He knew every slope, bend, and turn, probably from his younger days; but I almost found myself, with a shiver, believing in the transmigration of souls—as if, now reincarnated, he had belonged there; and the enigmatic Sphinx watches, so near, but also sightless. The treasures of Tut-ankh-amen also remind one of days when the distance between the High and the Low must have seemed for ever unbridgeable. The evidence for the placing of the little site of refuge, after the Flight into Egypt, seems very strong; below the level of the Nile, it is impressive in its simplicity.

From Port Said to Gibraltar it was still ‘summer’—even into the first week of December. But to warn us of weather to come, after “the Rock,” it grew cold and damp. Joyce would have been getting acclimatized to these conditions in England now for the last couple of weeks. I thought of the heat and dust of Iran and Afghanistan, and refused to grumble. How I had longed for rain, and cold!

Liverpool certainly did its best for me (even more than my beloved London: how dearly I love my capital, after travel!). It is true, the ‘summit’ of the Liver Building was just visible, but snow was falling fast! I was thousands of miles away: it was the PANJSHIR I saw—not the Mersey—and I was looking for the summits of the Hindu Kush—in a blizzard.

## *Afterthoughts*

A period of several months away from one's own country gives one time to absorb what one sees; avoids the danger of forming general opinions based on specific examples; and gives one the opportunity of hearing all points of view.

To travel slowly allows one to observe at first hand the details which make the true picture.

To travel through other countries *en route* gives one the chance to compare and contrast standards and conditions.

In Afghanistan we found a virile race obviously of mixed origin, often with characteristics more European than Asiatic.

It was interesting, and not a little frightening, to note the influences being exerted from outside on this intelligent people, ready and anxious to develop on modern lines. Whither Afghanistan?

As mountaineers we found the mountains of the Hindu Kush very different from any others we had ever tackled. The extreme end of the Himalayan chain, they lack the majesty of the giants even of the Karakoram. Apart from Mir Samir, which is to some extent isolated, the range is broken and ragged in outline.

The climber must beware of the brittle rock, rather unreliable weather, and the vast range of temperature. The unpredictable behaviour of the men one finds to act as porters is another factor to be taken into account.

When all this has been said, we would unhesitatingly assert that a journey into the heart of Afghanistan is a unique and wonderful experience.

J.D.  
E.W.B.



## *Appendix*

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